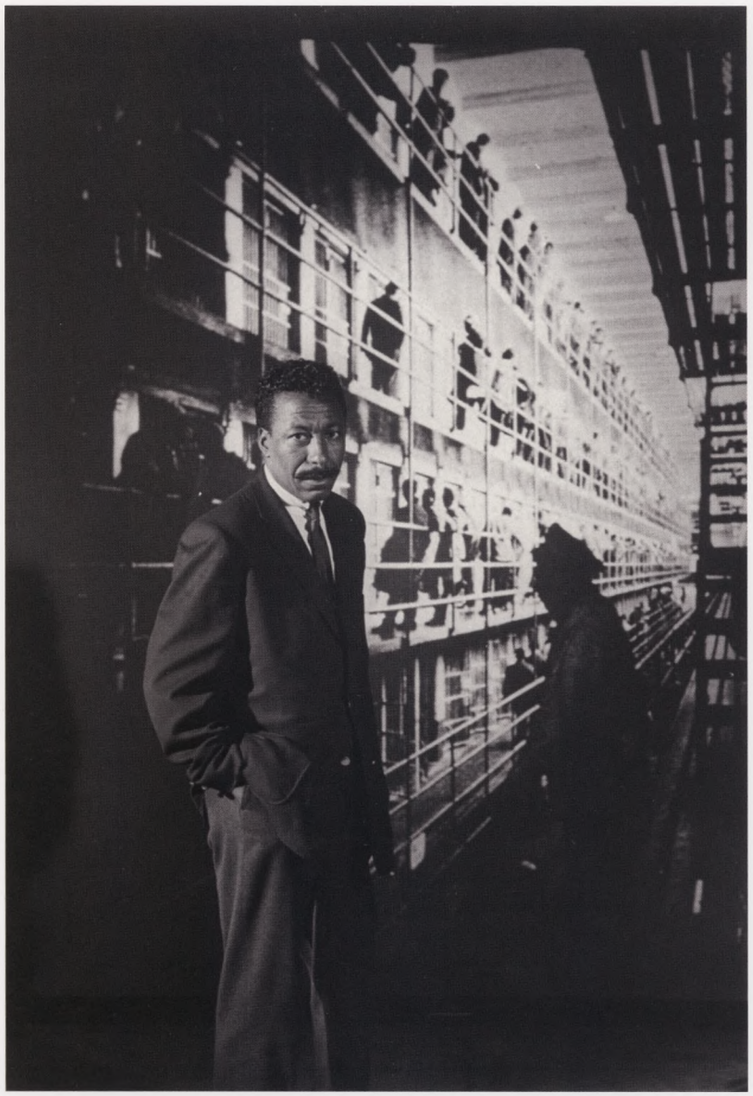
Gordon Parks
The Atmosphere of Crime, 1957

Sarah Hermanson Meister

With essays by
Nicole R. Fleetwood
Bryan Stevenson

Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr.
Series Editor



My assignment: explore crime across America. A journey through hell . . .
The year was 1957. I rode with detectives through shadowy districts,
climbed fire escapes, broke through windows and doors with them.
Brutality was rampant. Violent death showed up from dawn to dawn.

Gordon Parks

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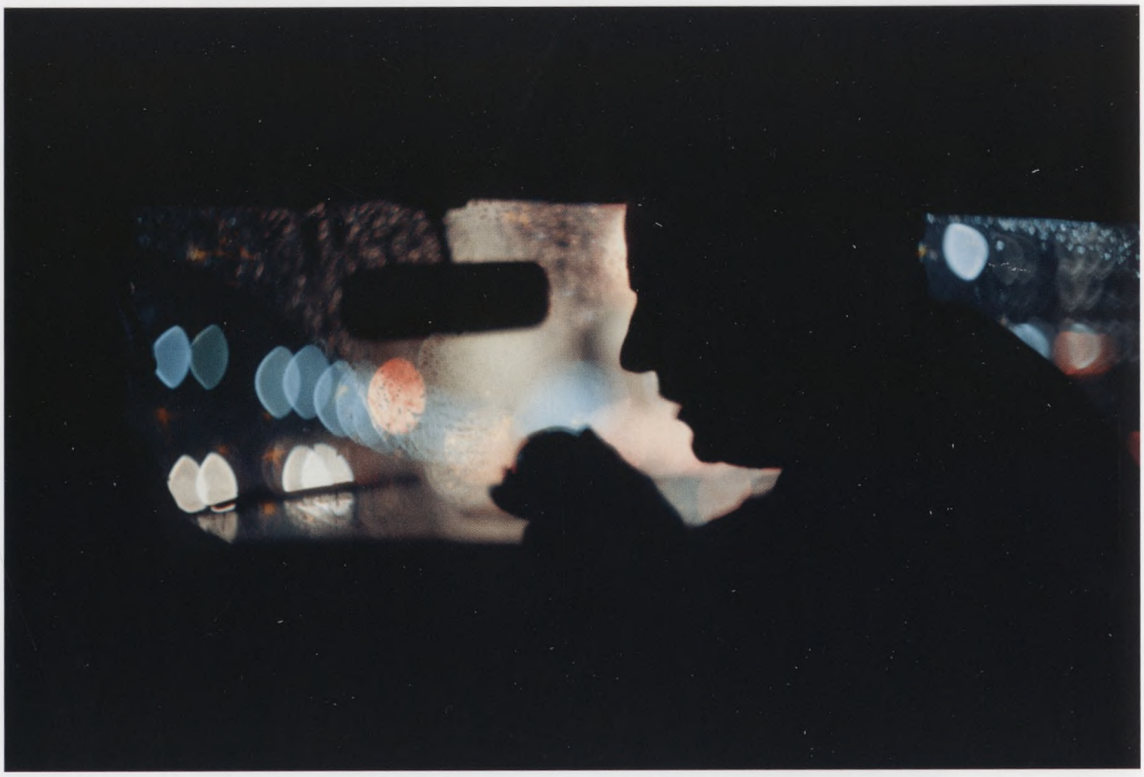
Directors' Foreword



Gordon Parks: The Atmosphere of Crime, 1957 is the latest publication organized by the Gordon Parks Foundation since its formation shortly after the artist's death in 2006. This book examines one of Parks's memorable assignments for *Life* magazine—an eight-page photo essay about crime in America's cities. The photo essay was noteworthy not only for its aesthetic sophistication but also for the ways in which it boldly questioned stereotypes about criminality that were then pervasive in the mainstream media.

Parks was an artist of many talents: photographer, filmmaker, novelist, poet, memoirist, choreographer, and composer. Employing the camera as his "weapon of choice," as he called it, he set out to represent the reality of the African American experience and, through the power of his imagery, to change it. Born in 1912 in Fort Scott, Kansas, he endured a childhood of abject poverty and Jim Crow segregation. His artistic ambitions were shaped by these early years. "Everyone must face the problems of humanity," Parks said in 1961. "My way of facing these issues is through photography. It is important because it can show, without needing words, everything that is wrong and [that] can be improved."

Parks never wavered in his belief that photographs held the power to inform, persuade, and motivate. But he also understood that they had to be seen in order to change minds and prompt action. So he sought outlets with broad reach, contributing to *Ebony*, *Fortune*, *Glamour*, *Vogue*, and *Life*. Some of his pictures testified to harsh social conditions and allowed readers who were for the most part invisible, marginalized, or stereotyped in the media to see themselves in positive and empowering ways.

With these social concerns in mind, Parks approached the subject of urban criminality for a 1957 photo essay for *Life*. By the time of the assignment, he had been a *Life* staff photographer for nearly a decade, the first African American to hold this position. He spent six weeks with a reporter, Henry Suydam, investigating inner-city criminality in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Unlike many of his photographs from this era, the images for "The Atmosphere of Crime," as the photo essay was titled, were in color. They provided a richly hued, cinematic portrayal of a largely hidden world: that of violence, police work, and incarceration.

"The Atmosphere of Crime" captured its subject with empathy and candor. Parks rejected media clichés associated with delinquency, drug use, and corruption, opting for a more nuanced view that reflected the social and emotional factors tied to criminal behavior and that revealed a rare glimpse of the working lives of those charged with preventing and prosecuting it. Transcending the romanticism of the gangster film, the suspense of the crime caper, and the racially biased depictions of criminality then prevalent in American popular culture, Parks coaxed his camera to do what it did best: record reality so vividly and compellingly that it would invite *Life*'s readers to see the complexity of chronically oversimplified socioeconomic narratives.

The subject of urban crime riveted Parks, and he would return to it throughout his career. It was the focus of his first project for *Life*, in 1948, "Harlem Gang Leader." Parks was the first black director of a major Hollywood film, the semiautobiographical coming-of-age story *The Learning Tree* (1969), which unfolded against a backdrop of racism and violence in rural Kansas, but urban crime reemerged as the subject of his second, blockbuster picture, *Shaft* (1971). Upending racial stereotypes and challenging the industry's history of prejudice and exclusion, *Shaft* gave black audiences "a hero they hadn't had before," as Parks later observed. The action film, which followed the adventures of suave Harlem private investigator John Shaft, changed how black characters were represented in Hollywood films and led the way for other black directors, including Spike Lee, Ernest Dickerson, Mario Van Peebles, and John Singleton.

For more than a decade, projects undertaken in partnership with the Gordon Parks Foundation—exhibitions, catalogues, books, scholarly articles, and student writing—have expanded our understanding of the artist and the impact of his work. *Gordon Parks: The Atmosphere of Crime, 1957* continues in this tradition, presenting to the public a sustained look into a photographic series that remains as socially relevant and artistically engaging today as it was when it was first published, in part, more than sixty years ago.

We would like to acknowledge the work of Sarah Hermanson Meister, Curator in the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, for her incisive shaping of this book, and the contributions of Nicole Fleetwood and Bryan Stevenson in their important essays. Collectively, their scholarship illuminates a crucial chapter in Parks's career and constitutes a valuable addition to our contemporary understanding of the intersection of crime, justice, and their representation through the medium of photography. Fittingly, the *Life* photo essay at the heart of this project has a special connection to the Museum. In 1993, Parks donated a gelatin silver print of an image taken for "The Atmosphere of Crime" (see page 112) in honor of Edward Steichen, former director of the Museum's Department of Photography. More than twenty-five years later, MoMA is pleased to acquire from the Gordon Parks Foundation a substantial selection of photographs from "The Atmosphere of Crime." With this acquisition, and anticipating the many ways in which Parks's achievement will feature in the displays we organize for our public, we celebrate these extraordinary images that elucidate their complex present as forcefully as they advocated for a more just future.

Glenn D. Lowry
The David Rockefeller Director
The Museum of Modern Art

Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr.
Executive Director
The Gordon Parks Foundation

The Lens of Gordon Parks: A Different Picture of Crime in America

Bryan Stevenson

On an early spring day in 1920, terrifying news spread through seven-year-old Gordon Parks's racially segregated community in Fort Scott, Kansas: a young black man had been tortured and then lynched by a mob of more than a thousand white people in a town twenty-five miles away. Albert Evans had been passing through Mulberry, Kansas. Local press referred to him as a "negro tramp," accused of assaulting a white girl.[1] After he was taken to the jail in Mulberry, the mob pulled him out through a window and lynched him, even though he had not been convicted of any crime. A white man who initially accused Evans later admitted to the assault.

Estimates put the murderous crowd at close to 1,500 people, but no one was prosecuted for the lynching, even after black community leaders and the NAACP protested. The coroner for the town of 2,500 concluded in his report:

> Albert Evans came to his death in Mulberry on April 19, 1920, feloniously by being hanged by a mob, the members of which were unknown. The county officials and city officials of Mulberry did all in their power to prevent the lynching.

What do we mean by "crime" in America? The question should be easy to answer—we have detailed codes and statutes that forbid certain conduct defined as a criminal offense. We have an elaborate system of policing, prosecution, punishment, and incarceration that involves millions of people. But there's a great deal more to how we think and talk about crime, and certainly to how we see and enforce criminal laws.

From the beginning, the prosecution and punishment of crime in this country have been profoundly shaped by race, poverty, power, and status. For centuries politicians have stoked fear of crime and exploited perceived crime waves, while our public discourse about crime has been compromised by persistent inattention to our history of racial violence. There is a different narrative about "crime in America" that we have for the most part ignored.

In 1957, *Life* magazine editors engaged staff photographer Gordon Parks and writer Robert Wallace to explore crime in the United States. The published article, by Wallace and staff editors, was a myopic rendering of the dominant narrative about crime and criminality, emblematic of a discourse shaped by politicians, law enforcement officials, and criminologists not interested in reckoning with pervasive racially motivated criminality.[2]

Gordon Parks's photographs told a different story. As an African American survivor of racial injustice, he was keenly aware of race and class in America, and this palpably informed his photography and his art. He consistently humanized people who were meant to be objects of scorn and derision. It's this dissonance with a conventional crime narrative that makes his "crime" photos for *Life* so compelling today.

~

Gordon Parks is one of the twentieth century's greatest artists. His photography documented with unparalleled clarity human suffering, racial injustice, and the struggles of the poor and marginalized. As a filmmaker and writer, he explored and illuminated racial segregation, fearlessly telling the stories that mainstream media ignored. His 1971 breakout movie, *Shaft*, changed American cinema with a new genre that continues to influence filmmaking today. He saw life in this country through a unique lens.

Born in 1912, Parks was the youngest of fifteen children in a Kansas family directly affected by the racial hierarchy, segregation, violence, and terrorism that defined the era for black people. When he was eleven, three white boys threw young Gordon into a river, knowing he could not swim. He survived the attempted lynching by staying underwater until he found a tree root, and pulled himself to the surface, saving himself from a criminal act for which there was no expectation of prosecution or punishment. The brutality and menace of racial animus drove Parks to use his camera as "a weapon against poverty, against racism, against all sorts of social wrongs."[3] His "Segregation Story" for *Life* magazine exposed bigotry, hatred, and economic injustice in a compelling and poetic portrayal of race and poverty in the South that tried to push the nation forward in its slow reckoning with racial apartheid.[4] Parks's photographs unforgettably juxtaposed the humiliation that Jim Crow inflicted on black people with the shameful indifference of a republic that championed equality and freedom (figs. 1, 2).

Fig. 1 Gordon Parks, *Drinking Fountains*, Mobile, Alabama, 1956. The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York

Parks became attuned to the hypocrisy around discussions of crime after experiencing small-town racial violence in Kansas and urban poverty as an older teen in Saint Paul, Minnesota. His 1948 photographic essay on Leonard "Red" Jackson humanized the teenager whom *Life*'s editors described as "a notorious Harlem gangster"—so much so that the magazine cropped and altered the photographs to reinforce stereotypes and fears about black urban crime.[5] The misinterpretation of Parks's photography is less dramatic in *Life*'s 1957 crime series, but it's still apparent.

Fig. 2 Gordon Parks, *Outside Looking In*, Mobile, Alabama, 1956. The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York

In most American media in the 1940s and 1950s, crime was what politicians and law enforcement officials said it was. News coverage focused on the criminal behavior that most concerned white middle- and upper-income people—the consumers targeted by the culturally specific ads in that 1957 issue of *Life* (figs. 3–6). The ads say a lot about the kind of America editors and advertisers believed *Life* readers wanted.

Rhetoric about crime was a tool to influence how other issues were framed. Policies on immigration, unionization and workers' rights, voting, and access to natural resources could be affected with a crime narrative that disadvantaged the poor and benefited political elites. This is not to say that crime wasn't real. There were justifiable concerns about the rise of organized crime in the first half of the twentieth century. Economic and social conditions in poor communities fueled violence that was evident in the number of sexual assaults and other physical crimes, as well as economic offenses including robbery and burglary.

Parks recognized the disconnect in traditional crime narratives with a larger history of bias against the poor and people of color. It's clear that he wanted to use his camera to complicate the view held by most Americans. His photographs told a divergent narrative about crime in 1957—one that cast the urban poor, "youth gangs," and the police in a very different light.

Crime in America

From the very beginning in America, settlers demonstrated a disconnected consciousness about crime. Early white settlers were quick to impose extreme punishments—stockades, whipping, execution—for moral offenses we no longer consider criminal, and at the same time showed no concern about the persecution and mass murder of Native people.

Hundreds of thousands of Native people were killed by famine, forced relocation, armed violence, and disease introduced by European settlers. While scholars can debate how much of this death and destruction was "criminal" in a legal sense, there is no dispute that violence against Native people cultivated a racialized view of crime and victimization. Assaults against and abuse of people of color were largely ignored and minimized, while offensive behavior by people of color became a national obsession.

This conceit was compounded during the slavery era. Whatever government officials did to legitimate the enslavement of black people after 1619, there is no denying that millions of Africans were kidnapped and taken to the New World. In every colonial state, kidnapping was a crime with severe punishment; "man-stealing [was] to be punished by death." But early Americans quickly learned that criminal laws didn't exist to protect people who were black. Sexual assault and rape have always been codified as serious felonies, and thousands of mixed-race children gave dramatic testimony to rape against enslaved black women, but the widespread victimization of black women was almost never prosecuted.

This racialized view of crime and criminality was codified in the nineteenth century through so-called Black Codes, or Black Laws, that expressly considered the race of the accused and the race of the victim to determine what was a criminal offense. Murder and rape were recognized as crimes regardless of race, but a white person who killed or raped a black person might be fined $100, while a black person convicted of killing or raping a white person faced mandatory execution. Such racial disparities persist today.

Black autonomy expanded after the end of the Civil War, yet white supremacy remained deeply rooted. The failure to unearth those roots left black Americans exposed to terrorism and victimization by criminal mobs for more than a century. The widespread assault of black Americans at the hands of white mobs was not only ignored but also often excused or defended. On May 1, 1866, white police officers in Memphis, Tennessee, began firing into a crowd of African American men, women, and children gathered on South Street. White mobs rampaged through black neighborhoods with the intent to "kill every Negro and drive the last one from the city."[6] Over three days, forty-six African Americans were killed; two white people were killed by friendly fire.

In New Orleans less than three months later, a group of African Americans—many of whom had been free before the Civil War—attempted to convene a state constitutional convention to extend voting rights to black men and repeal the racially discriminatory Black Codes. When the delegates convened at the Mechanics' Institute on July 30, 1866, a white mob began firing on black marchers, indiscriminately killing convention supporters and unaffiliated black bystanders. Instead of maintaining order, white police officers attacked black residents with guns, axes, and clubs, arresting many and killing several. By the time

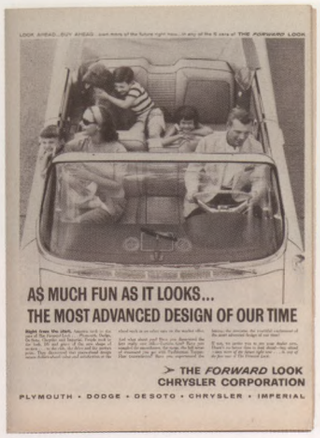

AS MUCH FUN AS IT LOOKS...
THE MOST ADVANCED DESIGN OF OUR TIME
THE FORWARD LOOK
CHRYSLER CORPORATION
PLYMOUTH · DODGE · DESOTO · CHRYSLER · IMPERIAL

Fig. 3 Chrysler Corporation ad, *Life*, September 9, 1957, p. 23. The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York

GLEEM
GLEEM ....the toothpaste for people who can't brush after every meal
JUST ONE BRUSHING destroys decay-and odor-causing bacteria.

Fig. 4 Gleem toothpaste ad, *Life*, September 9, 1957, p. 66. The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York

Fig. 5 Miller High Life beer ad, *Life*, September 9, 1957, p. 71. The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York

Fig. 6 Hit Parade cigarettes ad, *Life*, September 9, 1957, p. 79. The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York

federal troops arrived to suppress the white insurgency, perhaps as many as forty-five black people were dead.

A new period of horrific violence, mass murder, and criminality erupted after the Civil War, during which thousands of black people were killed. The efforts of the federal Freedmen's Bureau to enforce legal protections for black people were usually thwarted, and there was little accountability for the crime wave that defined this period. As historian Leon F. Litwack has written, "How many black men and women were beaten, flogged, mutilated, and murdered in the first years of emancipation will never be known."[7]

The Freedmen's Bureau documented firsthand accounts of the violence against black people during emancipation that have been mostly ignored and forgotten.

> The freedmen here have been kept in perfect terror of their lives by the desperate men of the County who are hostile and active in abusive assailing and murdering this inoffensive people all over the County for any and every pretext that human ingenuity can devise and often without any plea whatever. Consequently the freedmen are restricted so much that they are afraid to report the murder of a black man until their confidence is obtained. These malcontents, villains and murderers are numerous and vicious and smarting under a sense of lost mastery over their former slaves and determined they shall not enjoy their freedom.[8]

> In no instance in any of the foregoing cases has a white man been punished for killing or ill treating a freedman. . . . On the other hand, of the three freedmen charged with murder, two have been convicted and hung. There can be no doubt but that in some of the North Western Parishes of this state many murders and outrages have been committed which will never be brought to right and it is thought the aggregate number of murders given above would be more than doubled had all the cases been reported to the Agents of the Bureau.[9]

Even after the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution were enacted to guarantee equal protection under the law, racialized thinking about crime persisted. A social, legal, economic, and political system built to defend racial hierarchy spread across the country. Brutal crimes against black people were not acknowledged—much less prosecuted—as crimes, while elaborate schemes were constructed to prosecute black people for almost anything. Black people seen as less than fully human "slaves" were now seen as less than fully human "criminals."

Fear of black criminality fueled crime-control strategies that intensified whenever black people asserted their independence or achieved a measure of success. Reconstruction—with its black elected officials, black entrepreneurs, and black professionals—was violently dismantled by white mobs and replaced by convict leasing. At the turn of the twentieth century, white policy makers made up "crimes" enforceable only against black people, such as assembling after dark, being in groups of more than five people, and not obtaining permission from a former employer before seeking a new job.

Unable to pay fines and fees, tens of thousands of black people were "leased" to businesses, mining companies, industrialists, and farmers, and forced to work. As Douglas Blackmon's Pulitzer Prize–winning book documents, it was "slavery by another name."[10] Black people were housed in oppressive and inhumane conditions; in some camps nearly half of the prisoners died from disease, malnutrition, or abuse. Unlike slavery, whereby enslavers

had a financial interest in keeping their enslaved property alive and well enough to work, convict leasing allowed managers to replace one leased prisoner with another. In that way, it was, as historian David Oshinsky writes, "worse than slavery."[11]

Gordon Parks was born during one of the worst periods of unregulated criminality in the United States: the era of racial terror lynching. The contradiction between rhetoric about "crime" and the lived reality of racial terrorism shaped how he saw the world around him.

Between the end of Reconstruction and the outbreak of World War II, thousands of African Americans were lynched in the United States. Lynchings were violent and public acts of torture that traumatized black people throughout the country, and they were generally tolerated by state and federal officials. These lynchings were terrorism. Between 1880 and 1950, racial terror lynchings forced African American men, women, and children to endure unrelenting fear, humiliation, and barbarity. It was a period of such open defiance of the law and unregulated criminality that perpetrators of these crimes actually posed for photographs with the battered, bloodied, and burned bodies of their victims (fig. 7).

Fig. 7 Unknown photographer, *Center, Texas, Lige Daniels, August 3, 1920* (detail). Gelatin silver print postcard, 3 1/2 x 5 1/2 in. Collection of James Allen and John Littlefield, National Center for Civil and Human Rights, Georgia

Even the most extraordinary acts of criminal conduct went unpunished. In 1901, according to one account, Ballie Crutchfield, a black woman in Smith County, Tennessee, was lynched in plain view of hundreds of white people after her brother allegedly found a lost wallet containing $120 and kept the money.[12] He was arrested and about to be lynched by a mob but broke free and escaped, so the mob lynched his sister instead, despite the fact that no one claimed that she was involved in the alleged theft.

Newspapers and other media often celebrated these mob killings—and simultaneously lamented "crime waves" and officials' failures to protect white people from violence. In 2018, after the Equal Justice Initiative opened the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, a site in

Fig. 8 Page spread from "The Atmosphere of Crime," *Life*, September 9, 1957, pp. 54–55. The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York

Alabama's capital dedicated to thousands of victims of racial terror lynchings, the *Montgomery Advertiser* issued a rare apology for condoning and supporting racial violence during this era.[13] It remains an uncommon act of acknowledgment and reckoning with our nation's history.

Lynching had a profound impact on race relations in the United States and shaped the geographic, political, social, and economic conditions of African Americans in ways that are still visible today. Terror lynchings sparked the mass migration of millions of black people from the South into urban ghettos in the North and West throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

By the 1950s, black refugees and migrants mixed with immigrants in urban communities, where outsiders viewed them with contempt and suspicion. Aided by media exposés like the *Life* magazine project in 1957, the discourse about crime shifted focus to the emergence of urban centers populated by immigrants and by black refugees from the South.

For Gordon Parks, the plight of the urban poor and people who were presumed dangerous represented something more than degeneration and criminality. Where *Life*'s editors saw menace and threat, Parks saw suffering, struggle, despair, and fear. He wanted Americans to understand the vulnerability of people in stressed economic and social conditions, but his editors were unprepared for that level of nuance in their reporting on crime.

In one of Parks's crime series photos, the hand of an incarcerated man emerges through the bars of his jail cell while smoke from his cigarette floats into the air.[14] It conveys a sad, brooding anguish, a stark and somber bleakness that invites compassion. Editors seemed to acknowledge the mood of the photo (pl. 57), but they contrived to reassure readers against feeling empathy for the imprisoned man:

> The left hand of a man who knows the ropes nonchalantly dangles a cigaret through the bars of a Chicago prison. But the man's right hand, grasping the bars below, betrays him: he is frustrated and locked in.

Parks hoped to illuminate—in this series of mostly non-black subjects and in his later work—how unjustifiably threatening and violent police appeared to the urban poor and marginalized. His image of undercover officers kicking down an apartment door depicts a use of force that is ominous, while to the editors, the courageous officers are investigating "a suspicious room" (fig. 8).

Parks captured a vulnerability in his subjects, who were described in captions as "known criminals." His images of urban social life—familiar to the poor, people of color, and immigrants—are characterized in captions as ominous scenes of impending violence:

> Half expecting an explosive moment, youths lounge in a store-front light in New York's Puerto Rican district. Now they are bored. But someone is always kicking someone around, and they keep an eye on the dark.

The *Life* editors highlighted media headlines warning of "fiends and sadists and desperadoes" and outbreaks of "juvenile gang violence." Robert Wallace tried to complicate some of the hyperbole around crime and called for more scientific study in his article for the series. But he did little to contradict the traditional crime narrative or to invite readers to see the full story that Parks's images reveal.

We must examine his images anew, freed from the shade cast by *Life*'s editors. An uncompromised exploration of Parks's photography about crime is timely. At long last, we are reexamining our massive criminal justice system. The United States now has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. A recent study found that nearly 113 million Americans have immediate family members who are formerly or currently incarcerated.[15] In African American and Native American communities, 60 percent of those surveyed had experience with incarcerated family members. Hundreds of people have been executed in recent years. Thousands of innocent people have been wrongly convicted and imprisoned. We punish children and people with mental illness more harshly than any other country. A sevenfold increase in the incarceration of single mothers with minor children broadens the impact of our extensive carceral policies across generations. We simultaneously have an epidemic of gun violence, which goes unaddressed by elected officials beholden to a powerful lobby.

We face critically important questions involving how to think about crime and criminal justice reform in America today, and we must confront the truth about how we arrived here in order to move forward toward a more just system. As we examine our history of racial injustice and its legacy for discourse about crime, there is no better lens through which to see truth and wisdom than the artistry of Gordon Parks.

1. "Lynched Negro Is Identified," *The Sun* (Pittsburg, Kansas), April 23, 1920.

2. "Crime in the U.S." and "The Atmosphere of Crime" (photo essay), *Life*, September 9, 1957, 46–70. Parks worked directly with reporter Henry Suydam.

3. Quoted from "Gordon Parks, Legendary Photographer & Filmmaker, Dies at 93," *Jet*, March 27, 2006.

4. "Restraints: Open and Hidden," *Life*, September 24, 1956, 98–109.

5. "Harlem Gang Leader," *Life*, November 1, 1948, 96–106.

6. See Bryan Stevenson, "A Presumption of Guilt: The Legacy of America's System of Racial Injustice," in *Policing the Black Man: Arrest, Prosecution, and Imprisonment*, ed. Angela Davis (New York: Pantheon, 2017), 10.

7. Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 276.

8. Letter from Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) official, Sherman, Texas, October 6, 1866, The Freedmen's Bureau Online, https://www.freedmensbureau.com/texas/shermanoutrages2.htm.

9. Letter from Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) official, New Orleans, Louisiana, March 9, 1867, The Freedmen's Bureau Online, https://www.freedmensbureau.com/texas/shermanoutrages2.htm.

10. Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

11. David M. Oshinsky, *"Worse than Slavery": Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

12. Kerry Segrave, *Lynchings of Women in the United States: The Recorded Cases, 1851–1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 101, relates two versions of the story.

13. Editorial Board, "Our Shame: The Sins of Our Past Laid Bare for All to See," *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 26, 2018, https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/opinion/editorials/2018/04/26/shame-us-sins-our-past-equal-justice-initiative-peace-memorial-lynching-montgomery-bryan-stevenson/551402002/.

14. See "Crime in the U.S." and "The Atmosphere of Crime," 57, 54, 53, 49, 48, for the photograph and the following quotations.

15. "Groundbreaking Report: Half of All U.S. Adults Have Immediate Family Member Currently or Previously Incarcerated," FWD.us, December 6, 2018, https://www.fwd.us/news/groundbreaking-report-half-of-all-u-s-adults-have-immediate-family-member-currently-or-previously-incarcerated/; "Half of Americans Have Family Members Who Have Been Incarcerated," Equal Justice Initiative, December 11, 2018, https://eji.org/news/half-of-americans-have-family-members-who-have-been-incarcerated/.

JAMES
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PHIL SILVERS
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POLICE
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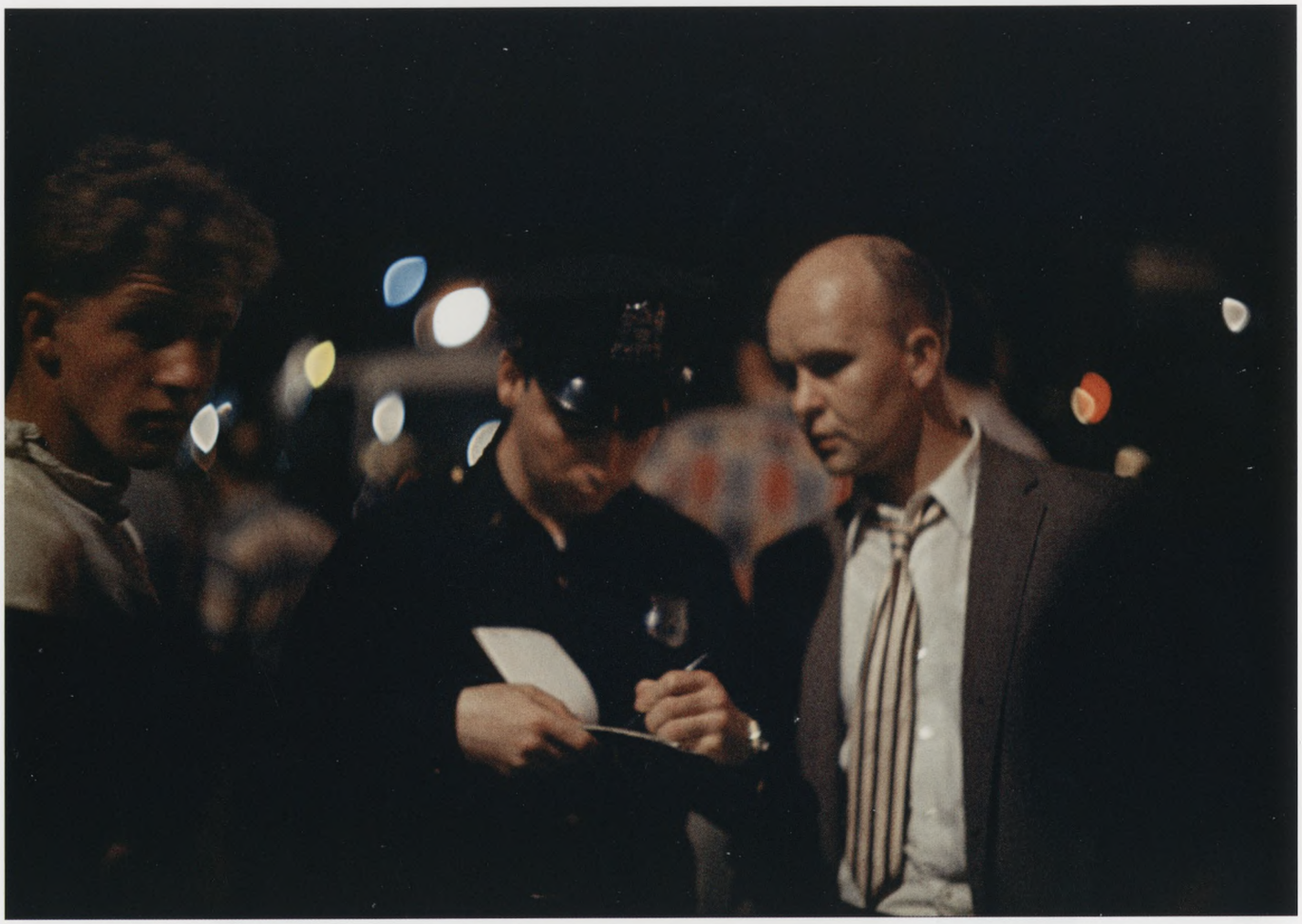

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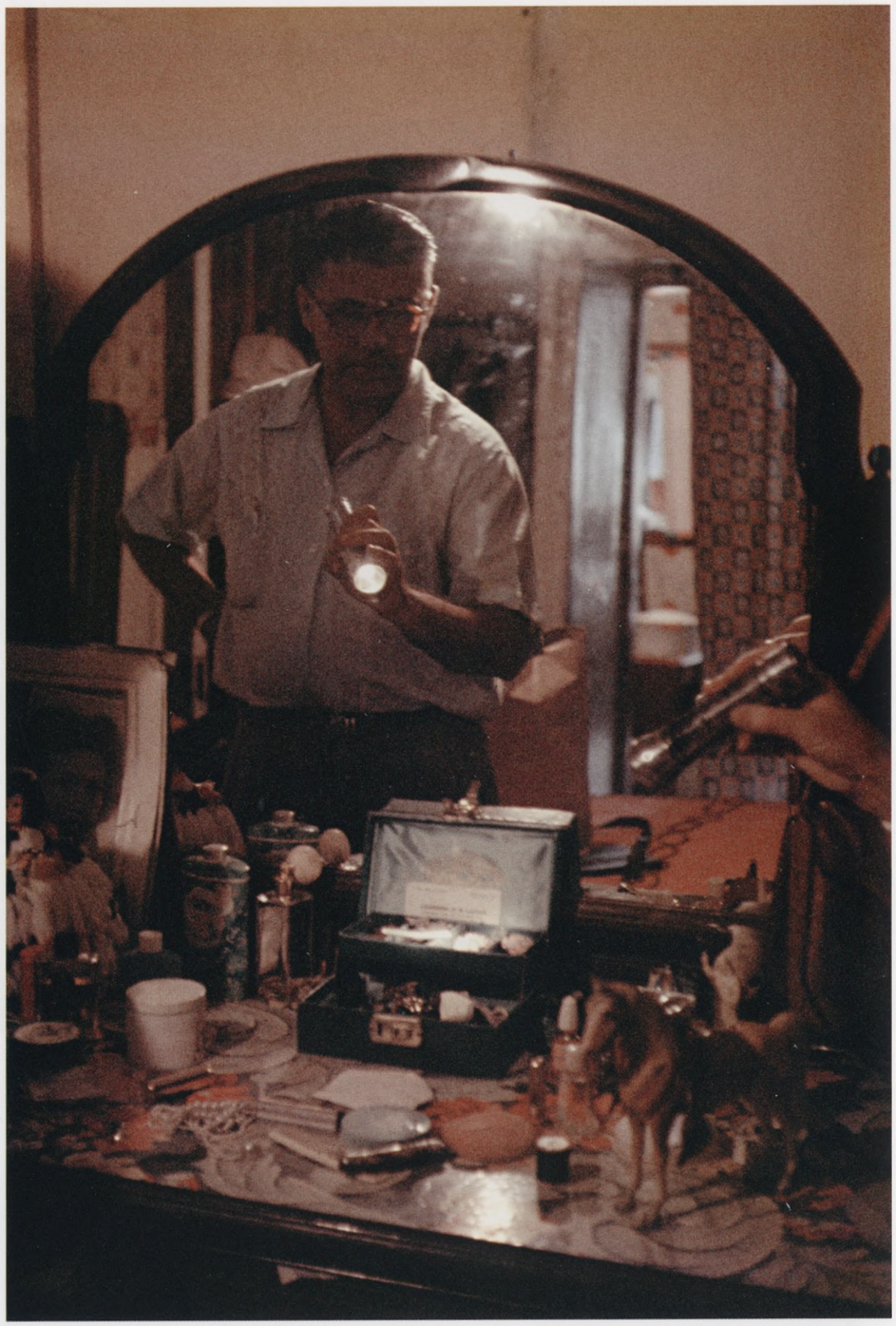
INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS

INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS

INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS

1956

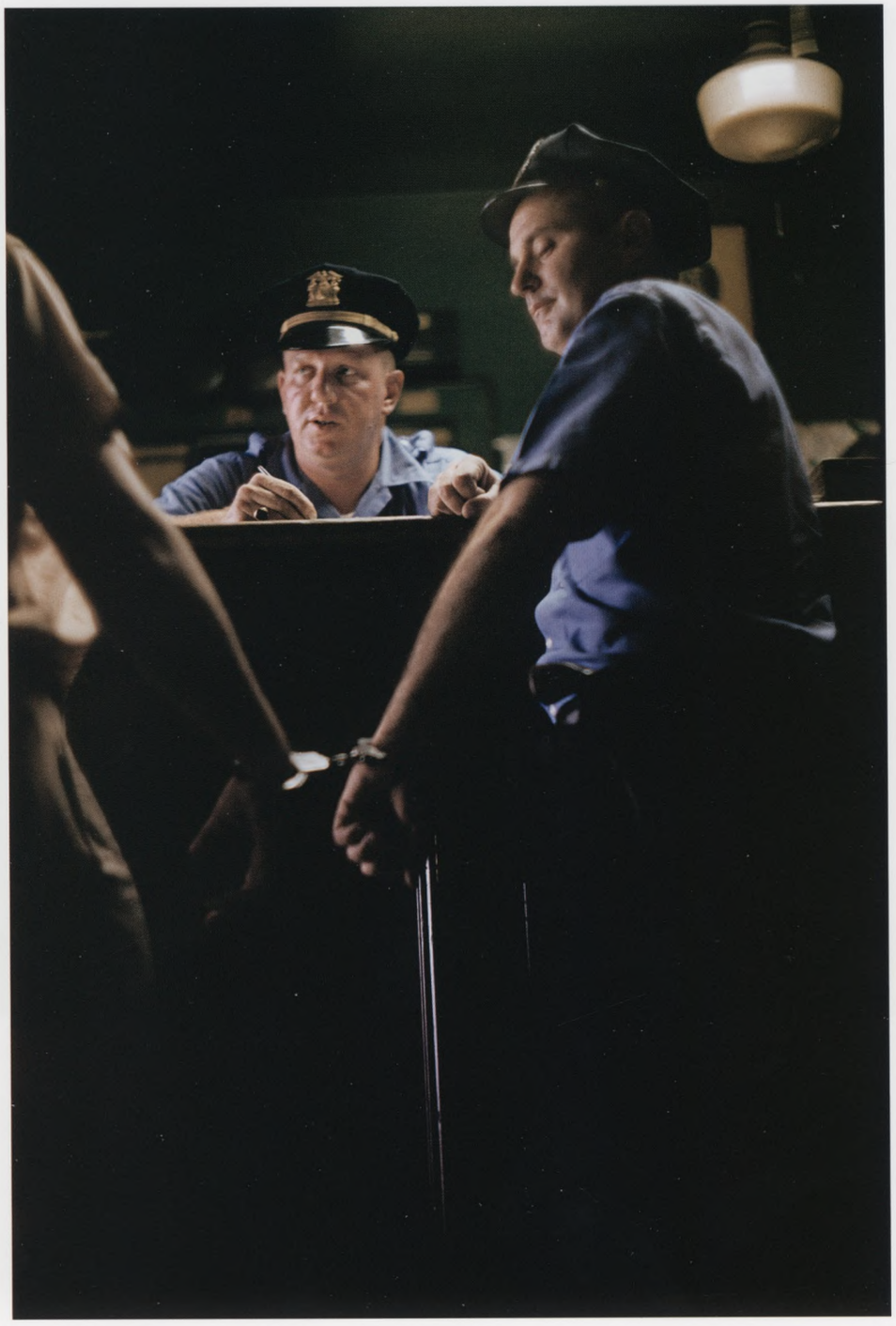
INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS



INSTITUTE OF PEACE

INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS

SLAVE SHIELD AT THE INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS



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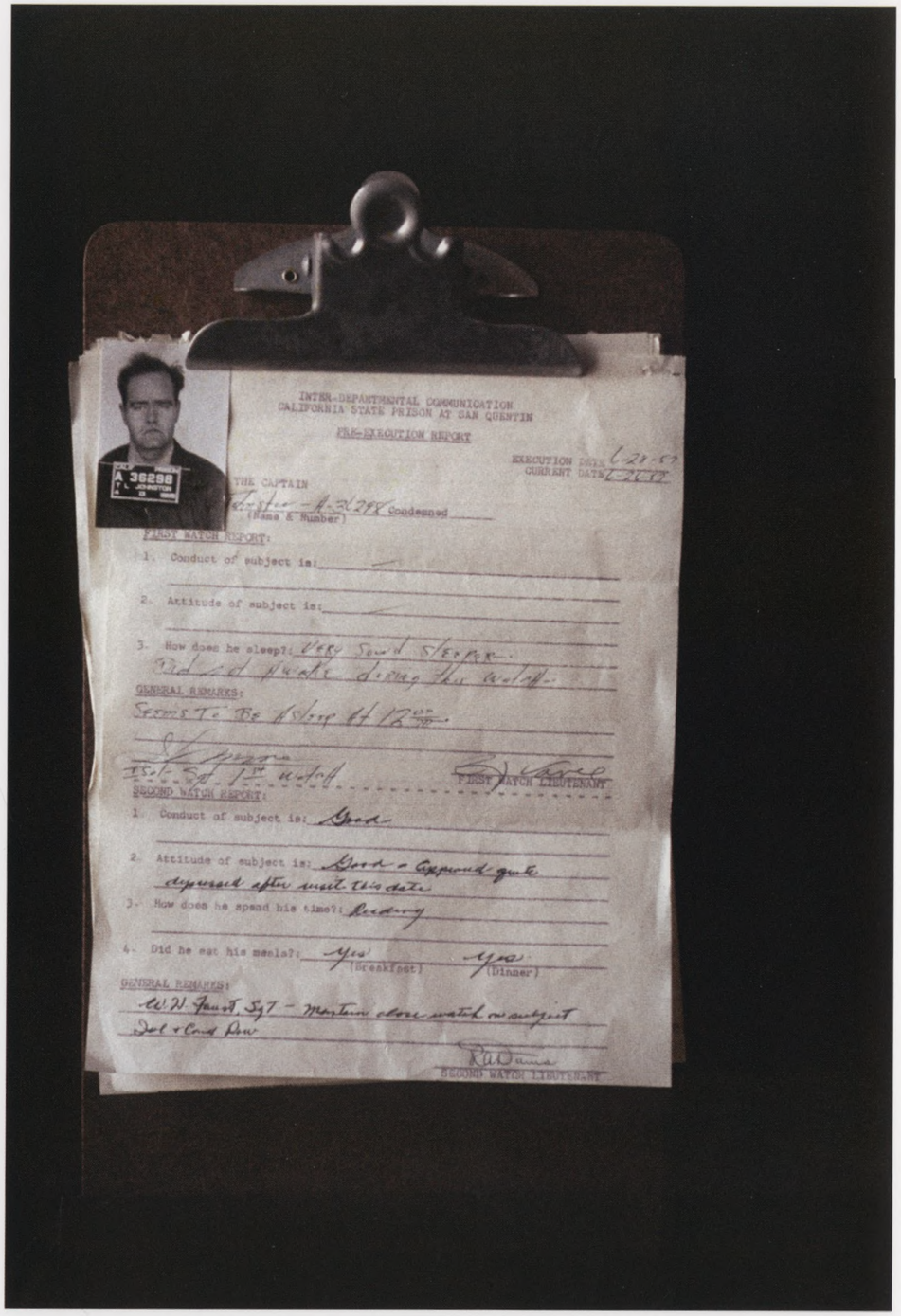
DEPT.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L. JOHNSTON
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION
CALIFORNIA STATE PRISON AT SAN QUENTIN
PRE-EXECUTION REPORT
EXECUTION DATE 6-20-57
CURRENT DATE 6-20-57
THE CAPTAIN
Luther A-2298 Condemned
(Name & Number)
FIRST WATCH REPORT:
1. Conduct of subject is:
2. Attitude of subject is:
3. How does he sleep?: Very Sound Sleeper.
Did not wake during the watch.
GENERAL REMARKS:
Seems To Be Asleep At 12 Mn.
1st Sgt. 1st watch
FIRST WATCH LIEUTENANT
SECOND WATCH REPORT:
1. Conduct of subject is: Good
2. Attitude of subject is: Good - Expressed quite depressed after visit this date.
3. How does he spend his time?: Reading
4. Did he eat his meals?: Yes (Breakfast) Yes (Dinner)
GENERAL REMARKS:
W. H. Faust, Sgt - Maintain close watch on subject
Del + Cond Row
SECOND WATCH LIEUTENANT

B

Policing and the Production of Crime

Nicole R. Fleetwood

On the cover of its September 9, 1957, issue, *Life* magazine announced a major new series, "Crime in the U.S." The six-part series delved into various aspects of criminalization, changes in the U.S. population both regionally and nationally, and developments in policing, while placing considerable emphasis on the difficulties of maintaining accurate crime statistics. "Crime in the U.S." was released at a crucial period, marked by massive demographic, political, cultural, and economic transitions across the country, including a more commercialized entertainment culture, notably rock and roll (accompanied by the fear among many whites that this music genre would lead to greater interracial sociability and intimacy); a growing youth population (i.e., baby boomers); the suburbanization of American life, which intensified racial and economic segregation; and the civil rights era.

In 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act, and black students—for instance, the Little Rock Nine—were on the front lines of integrating public schools. By then, the demographics of the United States had altered significantly from earlier in the century, because of the Great Migration of black people from the South to other regions of the country. As journalist Isabel Wilkerson beautifully narrates in her award-winning *The Warmth of Other Suns*, millions of black citizens moved to urban centers of the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, and West Coast between 1915 and 1970.[1] They relocated largely for economic opportunity and to escape the racial terror of the Jim Crow South. In Chicago, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, New York, St. Louis, and other cities, many found work—but they also found housing and employment discrimination, police profiling and brutality, segregated schools, and other forms of racism. Scholars Saidiya Hartman and Cheryl Hicks, among others, have examined that along with the shift of the black population from the rural South to the urban North came novel methods of managing, containing, and immobilizing black people.[2] Policing was central to the administration of these newly arrived individuals in urban centers.

These demographic changes were met with substantial public anxiety about rising crime and other threats, just as had happened with earlier migration, such as that of Italian, Irish, and Jewish people to the United States in the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. Some of the earliest examples of mug shots in the United States suggest a fixation on phenotypic traits of poor European immigrants as criminal types. In his 1890 photo-text study *How the Other Half Lives*, social reformer and documentarian Jacob Riis revealed the squalid conditions under which impoverished European immigrants in New York City lived and worked, to explain how societal neglect, inequality, and residential segregation produced categories of the criminal and heightened rates of crime and societal breaches.

In the twentieth century, the perception of American urban life in the mainstream media and among the dominant white public was generally negative, and racially coded by what historian Khalil Gibran Muhammad calls "the idea of black criminality."[3] Muhammad studies debates and theories about black criminality in the urban North that arose in the post-Reconstruction era and that set the ground for aggressive policing, criminalization, and imprisonment of black people throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

In the early and middle 1900s, black photographers including Gordon Parks and Roy DeCarava directed their lenses to create pivotal counternarratives to the dominant representations of black people and communities as depraved and crime-ridden. Parks's work for the Farm Security Administration and the Office of War Information in the early 1940s had secured his reputation as a vital chronicler of everyday black experience. When he joined *Life* later in the decade, his platform for documenting black people and their lives with dignity and care grew much larger.

Narratives of Crime

At the time that *Life* launched "Crime in the U.S.," fear and hysteria were the exaggerated responses to demographic changes and social transformations across the nation. The magazine's exposé on urban crime in 1950s America opens with journalist Robert Wallace's description of horrific and violent incidents of crime in different parts of the country. These register as a warning to readers of what is to come, both in the series and, more soberly, in the nation. Wallace writes, "From almost every major city in the past year have come frightening reports showing not merely an increase in the number of crimes but a dreadful shift, it seems, in their nature. Incredible brutality is the prime characteristic of contemporary murders. The vandalism of juveniles is no longer understandable even to the most indulgent and soft-minded adults but has become savage and wanton beyond belief."[4]

After painting this harrowing introductory scene, the article turns to a more nuanced investigation into how police forces, experts, and the public come to understand the frequency and threat of crime, locally and nationally. Wallace pauses to ask if there is really a crime wave in 1957 and to consider the role of the media in the public perception of crime, then notes: "Crime does exist and is widespread. There may indeed be a national wave of it, and if there is, it is a deadly serious problem. But hopefully, if it can be borne in mind that crime has always seemed at its dreadful peak to all generations and that calm men have often been ridiculed for making moderate statements about it, the discussion can get on to a basic point: statistics."[5]

Wallace cites data from the FBI, under the directorship of J. Edgar Hoover, and trends in the agency's twice-yearly Uniform Crime Reports, and then engages the work of Thorsten Sellin, a University of Pennsylvania sociologist, on inaccuracies of crime statistics in the United

Fig. 9 Gordon Parks, *Untitled*, San Quentin, California, 1957. The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York

States and the difficulty of tracking certain crimes, such as sexual assault. Not only are crime statistics, especially during the era, woefully inaccurate, but more important, they tether certain groups to the category of criminal subject. Khalil Gibran Muhammad has written about how the Uniform Crime Reports "became the most authoritative statistical measure of race and crime," wherein "'Black' stood as the unmitigated signifier of deviation (and deviance) from the normative category of 'White.'"[6]

While the *Life* series covers crime broadly, Wallace's article, citing several reports and crime experts, asserts that "Negroes" and "juvenile delinquents" are disproportionately responsible for crime. Partially resisting ideologies espousing the inherent criminality of these groups, Wallace also offers sociological and economic theories explaining this criminality. "In the case of Negro crime the picture is both clearer and gloomier than in the case of juvenile delinquency," he observes. "No matter what statistics are used—the number of arrests, the number sentenced to federal prisons—it is plain that Negroes are not only charged with a disproportionate amount of crime but actually commit it."[7]

Wallace makes clear that his reporting is not meant to endorse ideas of racial inferiority or inherent criminality. Instead, he argues that black crime rates are the product of racism. He quotes Sellin: "The responsibility lies where power, authority and discrimination has its [*sic*] source, the dominant white group."[8] Yet the aggressive policing of black communities, anti-black laws that make merely being black criminal, and racist practices in courts, sentencing, and imprisonment are not considered in the reporting of high crime rates among black populations.

For the September 9, 1957, issue of *Life*, Gordon Parks and reporter Henry Suydam collaborated on a photo essay titled "The Atmosphere of Crime." Parks's photographs here are remarkable for a number of reasons. They were shot in color, while he was known for the nuances and gradations of his black-and-white images. Further, his photographs serve as a counterpoint to the emphasis on crime statistics; they are more impressionistic and less concerned with data. Parks concentrates on what remains present no matter how statistics modulate and notions of crime change: namely, the workings of law enforcement, rather than purported crimes, criminals, or criminal scenes. Crime, as depicted in his photographs, must be understood in relationship to the function of policing and police officers as modes of contemporary governance. Through Parks's lens, crime is not a fact that exists outside its relationship to the state and the norms legislated by governing.

The photo essay might just as appropriately have been titled "Police Work," given how Parks's photographs depict officers patrolling dark streets, interrogating suspects, doing paperwork, searching people's arms for needle marks, kicking in doors, and knocking down people. The photographs explore the interdependence between policing and crime in complex ways. Micol Seigel, in her recent study of police work as "violence work," discusses how crime as a category depends on the laws and operations of the state:

> Criminologists point out that law and crime are deeply contingent, reflecting the biases of the time and the need to maintain social control, and challenge the unthinking equation of "harm" and "crime" by pointing out the intense harm done by actions never designated "crime" such as war, pollution, or systemic medical neglect. These dual challenges render "crime" conceptually incoherent. It certainly survives as a category of experience for participants or police, but critical thinkers cannot maintain it as a category of analysis.[9]

The atmosphere depicted in Parks's photographs is the quotidian power and violence that the police use to manage, arrest, and incapacitate vulnerable people—poor black families, drug users, sex workers, migrants, and so on. Seigel explains, "Police realize—they *make real*—the core of the power of the state," and that core power is "violence work."[10]

Documenting Police Work

In Parks's photograph *Raiding Detectives* (pl. 35), two white detectives in suits are captured in a dingy hallway of an apartment building. One kicks a door with his gun pointed. The other uses his fist. The word "raiding" in the

title is as jarring as the image. We see the detectives—we can identify them—doing police work. *Police Raid* (pl. 42) shows a white plainclothes officer attacking a black man on a stairwell. Here again, the hallway of a building where poor black people reside is a rehearsed site of state violence. The officer holds the arm of the man he assaults as the man falters, off balance, one foot on a step, the other suspended. With his arm held by the officer, the man keeps his hand up—hands up!—as a gesture of surrender, or perhaps self-protection.

Parks's precise identification of police work sets up a significant contrast with the people and communities most targeted by policing and arrest. He indexes the activities of police officers as part of the long arm of the state while rendering the suspect in a veil of privacy. In *Checking In Suspect* (pl. 49), we see two white officers at a counter and the arm of the purported suspect. Nothing else is revealed of the arrested subject. Parks's investigation of police work as activity of the state operates on multiple levels, with police officers the predominant figures in his photographs and gerunds or gerundives the salient terms of the titles: grilling, raiding, and fingerprinting are some of the categories of police work indexed. In *Detectives Grilling a Suspect* (pl. 51), we see the back of a handcuffed black man who stands as two white officers question him. One of the officers sits in a relaxed manner with his tie untied, smirking; the other leans on a desk, smoking a cigarette.

Parks's approach to criminal suspects, arrested people, and those who live in heavily policed neighborhoods is noticeably different. In one photograph taken in Chicago, we see the outline of a gun and a partial human figure. The figure moves in darkness toward a backlit room. The title of the work is *Crime Suspect with Gun* (pl. 37); Parks reveals very little about the person suspected of a crime. The photo is atmospheric and contrasts strikingly with the illumination Parks brings to policing and police workers.

Many of the scenes of purported crimes in action remain untitled: a close-up of hands preparing heroin to be injected; a man unconscious in a stairwell; weapons on a bed as a young white man looks up and away. These photographs do not have the precise titles of the documented police activity. The photographs of purported crimes and criminal subjects express a broader environment of policing, profiling, and criminalizing vulnerable people and can be read against the text that accompanies the article. Parks's photographs of drug addicts are especially compelling, as he seems to launch a critique of the criminalization of addiction, as in *Narcotics Addict* (pl. 48) and *Fingerprinting Addicts for Forging Prescription* (pl. 53).

Conclusion: The Prison State

In this short series for *Life*, shot over six weeks and consisting of a few dozen images, Parks deftly captured the processes of criminalization, policing, arrest, and imprisonment. His photos allowed readers in the 1950s (and permit contemporary audiences) to see the steps along these processes—complete with officers on their beat looking for suspicious activity, the shakedown of criminal suspects, the administrative procedures of arrest and fingerprinting, and finally the bars and walls of prison, in this case San Quentin in California.

In the photos of San Quentin, the setting alters dramatically from scenes of night skies lit by streetlamps or police searchlights to the order and austerity of a penal institution. Parks documents the architecture of prisons and the people who staff them (fig. 9). He chooses to obscure the identity of those convicted and imprisoned, by photographing them from behind or with their features blurred through security windows. In *Untitled* (pl. 70), incarcerated men stand in a tight corridor that runs along the cell units, and lean on the bars and columns. We cannot make out their features, but their bodies communicate a restlessness endemic to penal captivity. An officer standing opposite them looks down at columns of men below.

Parks's photographs foreshadow what will unfold in the coming decades, as civil rights activists and social movements make greater demands for equal rights, access, and justice, and as policing grows more aggressive and prisons more punitive. Seeing these images, we might ask what lessons we can learn from "The Atmosphere of Crime" to address the massive and brutal prison system we have inherited.

1. Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage, 2011).

2. See Cheryl D. Hicks, *Talk with You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), and Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019).

3. See Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 76.

4. Robert Wallace, "Crime in the U.S.," *Life*, September 9, 1957, 47.

5. Wallace, "Crime in the U.S.," 49.

6. Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, 13.

7. Wallace, "Crime in the U.S.," 67.

8. Wallace, "Crime in the U.S.," 67.

9. Micol Seigel, *Violence Work: State Power and the Limits of Police* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 6–7.

10. Seigel, *Violence Work*, 10, 9.

Framing Crime in Photographs

Sarah Hermanson Meister

"Our 12-day delve into the general subject of crime has left us with a bunch of ideas and theories about as hard to stack up as a pile of marbles."[1] So began a memo to Phil Wootton, then the assistant managing editor of *Life* magazine, regarding the series of articles that would open with Gordon Parks's photo story "The Atmosphere of Crime" on September 9, 1957. The subject is no less difficult to address today, although one might rightfully be encouraged by the range of notable artists, writers, and thinkers whose attention is focused on such matters.[2] It seems essential to acknowledge that museums—institutions that hope to offer productive platforms for conversations around issues of art, representation, and justice—are, to some, "a conduit for the currency of social legitimacy, serving as a site that momentarily quenches the endless thirst for the cult-like phenomenon at the heart of this reputational economy."[3] Museums can bestow this "legitimacy" through their exhibition or acquisition programs, functioning as an endorsement of an idea and enhancing monetary value.

Fig. 10 Cameron Rowland (American, born 1988). *Attica Series Desk*, 2016. Steel, powder coating, laminated particleboard, distributed by Corcraft. 60 × 71.5 × 28.75 inches. Rental at cost.

The Attica Series Desk is manufactured by prisoners in Attica Correctional Facility. Prisoners seized control of the D-Yard in Attica from September 9th to 13th 1971. Following the inmates' immediate demands for amnesty, the first in their list of practical proposals was to extend the enforcement of "the New York State minimum wage law to prison industries." Inmates working in New York State prisons are currently paid $0.10 to $1.14 an hour. Inmates in Attica produce furniture for government offices throughout the state. This component of government administration depends on inmate labor.

Rental at cost: Artworks indicated as "Rental at cost" are not sold. Each of these artworks may be rented for 5 years for the total cost of the Corcraft products that constitute it.

Cameron Rowland disrupts these intellectual and financial cycles in his refusal to support traditional modes of ownership that, for instance, might allow us to ignore the exploitation of prison labor: many of the works from his 2016 exhibition *91020000*, at Artists Space, can only be rented at cost, not sold (fig. 10).[4] And yet, the perils of reinforcing long-standing hierarchies and structures of privilege are no excuse to leave it to others to face these challenges. In light of this fact, I will attempt to contextualize this powerful and astoundingly evocative body of work by Parks within the history of crime (and criminals) in photographs, anchored in works from The Museum of Modern Art's collection. To know that my perspective will share these pages with the words of Bryan Stevenson and Nicole Fleetwood is an immense honor, and, I suspect, a meaningful way of pointing the conversation outward, where it belongs.

Picturing Criminals

Not long after its invention, photography was recognized as a productive tool to identify criminals, offering an ostensibly reliable substitute for hand-drawn sketches on "Wanted" posters, and inspiring the creation of so-called rogues' galleries in urban police stations in the mid–nineteenth century. Sheriffs in remote outposts might maintain albums of photographs with the likenesses of known criminals to identify and discourage their presence, and pages from these albums have now made their way to MoMA in midtown Manhattan (fig. 11). They appear to have been consulted with some frequency, to judge from the worn edges of the pages, and updated with aliases or other relevant observations ("Dead"). The people pictured on these pages are young and old, bearded and clean-shaven, mostly male, and almost exclusively white. In that they mirror the variety of individuals pictured in the 1886 publication *Professional Criminals of America*, they represent a typical cross section of scoundrels.

Fig. 11 Unknown photographer, Untitled (pages from an album of mugshots), 1870s–1880s. Albumen silver prints, each 2 15/16 x 2 9/16 in. (7.5 x 6.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

Even the author of this very authoritative volume, Inspector Thomas Byrnes, with twenty-three years' experience in New York City's police department, cautioned his readers: "In fact, it is a bad thing to judge by appearances, and it is not always safe to judge against

them."[5] His declared aim in compiling photographs of lawbreakers was to thwart and/or render unprofitable their nefarious activities by placing "their likenesses within reach of all," permitting each to be "recognized at a glance."[6] Nonetheless, the very structure of the book acknowledges how inadequate photographs are in serving this purpose. Each of the 204 criminals featured in it is identified by name, alias (if applicable), and criminal expertise ("Pickpocket, Sneak, Confidence and Forger"), and an extensive narrative describes each individual and his crimes (mostly "his"; eighteen women are included). Every text concludes with an assessment of the reliability of the photograph, for example: "Perris's picture is the best in existence. It was copied from one taken with a companion, and resembles him very much" (fig. 12). As this description implies, the photographs in Byrnes's book are copied from a variety of sources, ranging from "good" to "excellent" (but also occasionally woefully outdated). Most subjects look in the general direction of the camera, while many avert their gaze; one is depicted asleep, in bed. Small wonder that a more systematic approach, once known, was rapidly adopted across the United States.

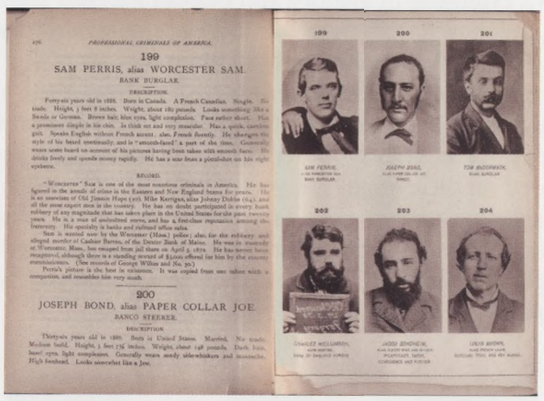

199
SAM PERRIS, alias WORCESTER SAM.
BANK BURGLAR.
DESCRIPTION.
RECORD.
200
JOSEPH BOND, alias PAPER COLLAR JOE.
BANCO STEERER.
DESCRIPTION.

Fig. 12 Thomas Byrnes (American, born Ireland, 1842–1910), *Professional Criminals of America*, New York: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1886, p. 276 and plate. Thomas Addis Emmet Collection, New York Public Library, New York

It was the French police officer Alphonse Bertillon who established the system that standardized what we now imagine when we hear the term "mug shot"—a pair of photographs mounted side by side, one with the subject facing the camera, the other in profile. Bertillon recorded his own likeness in this manner, as well as that of his twenty-three-month-old son—guilty, as noted on the verso, of "gluttony, nibbling all the pears from a basket" (fig. 13). The first edition of Bertillon's *Identification anthropométrique: Instructions signalétiques* appeared in 1885, followed by an expanded second edition in 1893, the first version to be published in English. Like Byrnes, Bertillon realized that to improve their reliability, photographs of criminals should be accompanied by a series of precise measurements and additional descriptive texts. As scholar Shawn Michelle Smith has noted, "Bertillon's system demonstrated that the photograph did not provide a transparent record, but required textual, discursive, and institutional support to make it legible. Called *Bertillonage*, this approach paradoxically heralded the mug shot while underscoring the insufficiency of photographic identification."[7] This absence of reliability could be what renders photographs of those accused of crimes so fascinating.

Fig. 13 Alphonse Bertillon (French, 1853–1914), *François Bertillon, 23 months (Baby, Gluttony, Nibbling All the Pears from a Basket)*, October 17, 1893. Albumen silver prints, 3 3/16 x 5 in. (8.1 x 12.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Suzanne Winsberg Collection. Gift of Suzanne Winsberg

A century after Bertillon, MoMA invited artist Barbara Kruger to organize an exhibition drawn from its collection. The result was *Picturing "Greatness,"* which pointed to our human tendency to ascribe fixed, definable characteristics, such as greatness, on the basis of a photograph (although Kruger's words could apply equally to criminality): "These images can also suggest how we are seduced into the world of appearances, into a pose of who we are and who we aren't. They can show us how vocation is ambushed by cliché and snapped into stereotype by the camera, and how photography freezes moments, creates prominence and makes history."[8] One of the images Kruger included was German photographer August Sander's portrait of the painter Heinrich Hörle, who bears a striking resemblance to Sander's *Political Prisoner* (figs. 14, 15). In the first half of the twentieth century, Sander sought to establish a taxonomy of faces he called *People of the Twentieth Century*, embedding in this ambition a recognition of its limitations, as the similar affect of Hörle and the unnamed political prisoner might suggest. Sander divided his magnum opus into seven groups, which were then subdivided into nearly fifty portfolios. Hörle's portrait appears in the portfolio "Painters," within the fifth group, Artists. "Political Prisoners" form their own portfolio within the sixth group, The City. Their distinct categorizations notwithstanding, Sander used photography to suggest what these men had in common (the political

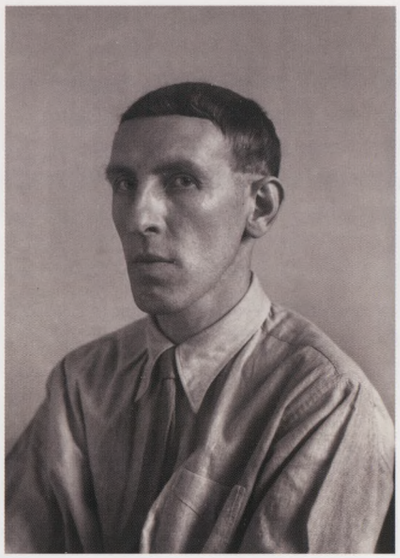


Fig. 14 August Sander (German, 1876–1964), *The Painter Heinrich Hörle*, 1928. Gelatin silver print, printed c. 1950, 16 3/8 x 11 3/4 in. (41.7 x 30 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder

Fig. 15 August Sander (German, 1876–1964), *Political Prisoner*, 1941–1944. Gelatin silver print, 10 3/16 x 7 3/8 in. (25.8 x 18.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of the family of August Sander

Fig. 16 August Sander (German, 1876–1964), *Criminal Type*, 1926–1930. Gelatin silver print, 10 3/16 x 7 3/8 in. (25.8 x 18.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of the family of August Sander

prisoner, after all, might have been a painter before his arrest, and resistance to the Nazi regime was sufficient to render anyone a political prisoner). This fluidity stands in dramatic contrast to the singularity of Sander's *Criminal Type*, whose awkward profile is included in the portfolio "Types and Figures of the City" (fig. 16). In mug shot–like profile image—unusual for Sander—he seems to be intimating that true criminality (unlike political opposition) is manifest in a photographic rendering, or, as Kruger observed, "snapped into stereotype by the camera."

Crime at MoMA

In May 2020, a selection of photographs taken by Parks for the 1957 *Life* magazine assignment is anchoring the installation *Gordon Parks and "The Atmosphere of Crime."* If the focus of the gallery were simply "Crime and Photography," it might revolve around the work of another photographer whose name is indelibly linked with the subject: Weegee, or Arthur Fellig, as he was named by his parents (fig. 17). The first five photographs by Weegee entered the Museum Collection in 1943, just in time to be included in the Museum's fifteenth anniversary exhibition, *Art in Progress*. However, having his prints displayed on the walls of a museum was not Weegee's primary concern: he earned his living selling photographs to tabloid newspapers in New York. He made his hyper-glossy prints (useful for crisp reproductions) from medium-format negatives exposed with a powerful flash that rendered details with startling precision, flattening the depth of a scene with graphic, clinical force. By contrast, Parks typically used smaller-format black-and-white negative (or color slide) film and available light, inviting, especially with his crime photos, a mysterious blur, impenetrable shadow, and enlarged grain that underscored the rough unpredictability of the scenes he witnessed. Since the 1940s, photographs made for practical purposes—publication in newspapers and magazines, for instance—by photographers who referred to themselves as professionals (albeit attentive to artistic concerns) appear regularly in MoMA's exhibition program. Their very presence was the Museum's answer to the question of whether or not they were art.

John Szarkowski, director of MoMA's Department of Photography from 1962 to 1991, organized two exhibitions that considered the particular aesthetic and pictorial aspects of photographs intended for the printed page. The first, in 1965, was *The Photo Essay*—described in the press release as "an exhibition reviewing the results of four decades of experiment in a new medium"—and it included Parks's 1948 story for *Life*, "Harlem Gang Leader."[9] This was followed in 1973 by *From the Picture Press*, which was accompanied by a paperback catalogue. Szarkowski was investigating the genre of news photography, "based on the premise that many of the most original and compelling news photographs describe events of minor historical significance, and that the formal and iconographic character of such pictures has made a significant contribution to the development of the modern visual vocabulary."[10] Parks understood that the most successful "crime" photograph might be only an oblique allusion to a criminal encounter: a policeman silhouetted against a scrim of city lights, detectives casually

Fig. 17 Weegee (Arthur Fellig) (American, born Austria, 1899–1968), *My Man*, 1941. Gelatin silver print, 10 5/8 x 13 1/4 in. (27 x 33.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

Fig. 18 Unknown photographer (New York *Daily News*), *Evidence: The sash cord was used to strangle Paula Magnana, the only clothing found on her body were her shoes and socks*, August 2, 1937. Gelatin silver print, printed 1989, 7 5/8 x 9 1/2 in. (19.4 x 24.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

socializing in an apartment where a crime has taken place, or reflections in a puddle outside the entrance to an emergency room. Photographs pertaining to crime constituted but a small part of those reproduced in either of the MoMA exhibitions, although some of the best of these, even by unknown photographers who (like Parks, on occasion) deploy synecdoche to refer to horrors outside the picture frame (fig. 18). If aesthetics were one framework through which photographs of crime were understood at MoMA, another examined the ways in which pictorial strategies were shaped by modes of circulation and intended function, such as the newspaper or illustrated magazine.[11]

MoMA's first acquisition of Parks's work came in 1993, and it included early gelatin silver prints from both "Harlem Gang Leader" and "The Atmosphere of Crime" (printing in color at that time would have been prohibitively expensive).[12] The historic presence of a print from the 1957 series is one answer to the question of why the Museum is keen to focus on this photo essay by Parks. Another is the opportunity to use this series as a catalyst for exploring a broader history of photography and crime. In 2019, after an extensive renovation and expansion, MoMA reopened with a newly imagined approach to installing its collection. Instead of separate suites of galleries attending to specific media, photographs (as well as drawings, prints, film, video, architecture, and design) are now integrated along a single chronological spine and rotated regularly. *Gordon Parks and "The Atmosphere of Crime"* is among the first of these rotations. Drawn exclusively from the Museum Collection (and acknowledging the inevitable idiosyncrasies of such an approach), the display uses nineteenth-century photographs of criminals as a point of departure, and situates this photo story for *Life* within the context of crime reported in daily newspapers, connects it with artists for whom the concerns of art and social justice have been as intertwined as they were for Parks.

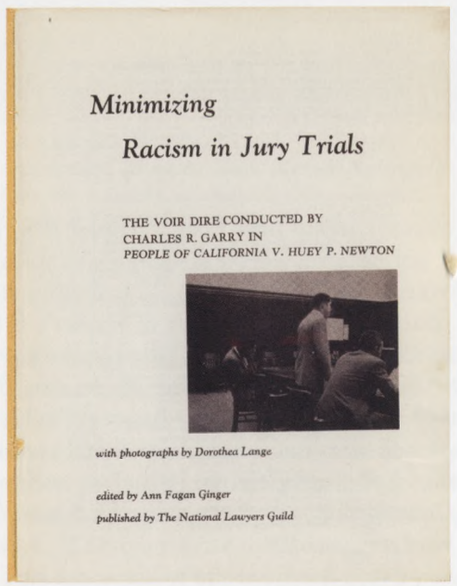

Minimizing
Racism in Jury Trials
THE VOIR DIRE CONDUCTED BY
CHARLES R. GARRY IN
PEOPLE OF CALIFORNIA V. HUEY P. NEWTON
with photographs by Dorothea Lange
edited by Ann Fagan Ginger
published by The National Lawyers Guild

Fig. 19 Ann Fagan Ginger, ed., *Minimizing Racism in Jury Trials: The Voir Dire Conducted by Charles R. Garry in* People of California v. Huey P. Newton, The National Lawyers Guild, 1969. The Museum of Modern Art, New York

One lesser-known example is Dorothea Lange, who photographed the public defender system in California between 1955 and 1957, focusing on Martin Pulich, the public defender for Alameda County, near San Francisco. Coincidentally, in the brainstorming for what would become the third article in *Life*'s series on crime ("The Qualities of Justice"), the editors proposed this: "We think there's a good picture story on the two forces that operate when a man is on trial—the public prosecutor and the public defender. The first has a mission to put the man in jail. The second has a mission to keep him out."[13] They even had a specific public prosecutor in mind: J. Frank Coakley, also from Alameda County. All they were missing was

a foil: "We have queried to find a public defender who might come up against him." They soon learned of Lange's photographs of Pulich, and went so far as to develop mock-ups of an article, but the proposal was abandoned, for unknown reasons, and replaced with a rather staid group of portraits of "Eminent American Jurists" by Philippe Halsman. Lange wouldn't live to see her photographs given the attention they deserved, but she surely would have been pleased that they were generously featured in the National Lawyers Guild publication *Minimizing Racism in Jury Trials*, issued in 1969 after Black Panther Huey P. Newton's trial for murder, assault, and kidnapping (fig. 19).

Crime in Life

On August 12, 1957, *Life* magazine announced that its forthcoming major series would examine crime in the United States "with a depth and thoroughness no other publication has ever attempted."[14] The Publisher's Preview continued: "The excitement and significance of the series—and its promise of spectacular photography—is hinted at by the tentative titles of each instalment: A Survey of Crime; A Big City Police Force; Laws and Courts and Judges; Prisons, Parole and Punishments; The Psychology of Crime; [and] The White Collar Criminal."[15] Gordon Parks was a clear choice for this assignment. He had been a staff photographer since the late 1940s; his first story for *Life*, "Harlem Gang Leader," persuasively visualized a world that was as unfamiliar to the magazine's average reader as "The Atmosphere of Crime" would be a decade later (fig. 20).[16] In that decade he produced many stories, in color and in black-and-white, on subjects ranging from Paris fashion to segregation. There is no record of the editors' discussing the fact that an African American photographer's perspective would be of particular value, yet they were keen to have the series counterbalance widespread sensationalism around the subject and justifiably pleased with what Parks produced. In the subsequent Publisher's Summary, Stanley Rayfield noted: "The editors believe Parks's photographs to be the largest and best collection of four-color crime pictures ever assembled."[17]

The editors entrusted Robert Wallace—a senior staff writer whose words had accompanied Parks's photographs for a 1956 story about segregation in the American South—with writing the initial article in the series.[18] His first sentence hints at the prevailing sense of panic while subtly deflating it: "The nation in the fall of 1957 appears to be threatened by a catastrophic wave of crime. From almost every major city in the past year have come frightening reports showing not merely an increase in the number of crimes but a dreadful shift, it seems, in their nature."[19] Wallace describes some exceptionally gruesome crimes, and cites J. Edgar Hoover, then director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in support of this alarmist position. But Wallace soon begins to challenge the FBI statistics, marshaling eminent sociologists who explain the ways in which these numbers are based on flawed (local) collection methods and modeling errors, and noting the negative impact of irresponsible reporting and misguided nostalgia. To answer the question "What should—or can—be done about it?" Wallace comes out strongly against the "get tough" approach then being implemented in New York, and points out that it "has been employed not merely for years but for centuries with only small success." Instead, he advocates "to take no extraordinary action at all but merely to think about it, to question every statement, 'fact' and 'statistic,' and to try to build up an accurate picture of what may—or may not—be happening. This approach . . . has, surprisingly, not often been tried."[20]

Fig. 20 Page spread from "Harlem Gang Leader," *Life*, November 1, 1948, pp. 96–97. The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York

There is no record of Parks's having directly influenced *Life* editors or writers, but by 1957 he was an established and esteemed staff photographer, so regular contact and casual conversation seem a reasonable assumption. Toward the end of the article, a discussion of "Negro crime" is presented by Wallace as a regrettably "clearer and gloomier" circumstance: "No matter what statistics are used—the number of arrests, the number sentenced to federal prison—it is plain that Negroes are not only charged with a disproportionate amount of crime but actually commit it." (This may have been "plain" to Wallace, but as Nicole Fleetwood and others have posited, statements such as these deserve further scrutiny.) To determine why this might be the case, Wallace points to "the great majority of sociologists" who agree that "the responsibility lies where power, authority and discrimination [have their] source, the dominant white group."[21] He continues, "Negroes are a 'have not' group, the victims of prejudice. . . . Until the dominant white group sees fit to give the Negro equality, the dominant white group may have to chew upon the following observation . . . credit[ed] to the Italian criminologist Enrico Ferri. 'Society,' said Ferri, 'has the criminality it deserves.'"[22] Wallace's conclusions that racial bias is an inextricable element of the narrative, and that blame lies with those who are making and enforcing the laws, continue to ring true.

We cannot know what Parks thought of these arguments in 1957, but his photographs—both those chosen to accompany Wallace's article and those orphaned in the files—capture a criminal world that does not divide neatly along racial lines. Stationed outside a police precinct in New York City, Parks records both black and white individuals exiting a police van, their purported crimes unknown. In a precinct in Chicago, it is similarly not possible to identify those accused on the basis of race. In a prison near San Francisco, the vast majority of the inmates appear to be white or light-skinned. Whether black or white, or of indeterminate race, criminals played only a supporting role in the story. Law enforcement agents (policemen, detectives, guards), on the other hand, were the primary actors, and they were predominantly white. Today, at a moment when police violence against unarmed black men, women, and children has intensified the distrust toward (predominantly white) officers, artist Kerry James Marshall destabilizes our race-based associations (fig. 21): In his painting, does the darker skin color of a police officer, or his informal posture, imply that the threat of force is any less menacing? Like Marshall, Parks would have been acutely aware of the ways in which race was an inescapable element of the broader discourse, but also attuned to the ways in which reality might not align neatly with stereotypes.

Fig. 21 Kerry James Marshall (American, born 1955), *Untitled (policeman)*, 2015. Acrylic on PVC panel with plexiglass frame, 60 x 60 in. (152.4 x 152.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mimi Haas in honor of Marie-Josée Kravis

After the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in April 1968, Parks wrote these words for *Life*: "White racists warned Dr. King that they would kill him. They kept their word."[23] By this time, Parks would have been responsible for both the photographs and the text in the articles he was assigned, and he took this opportunity to address *Life*'s (white) readers directly: "A man, white like you, blasted a bullet through [King's] neck. And in doing so the madman has just about eliminated the last symbol of peace between us. We must struggle to distinguish between *his* act and *your* conscience." In 1957 Parks may not have felt empowered to be so direct, and the face of crime may have been more ambiguous, but by 1968 his words, and their accompanying photographs, are crystal clear.

Parks and Crime

Parks was a regular contributor to *Life* magazine for more than two decades, during which time he and his camera stood witness to countless examples of poverty, fame, mourning, activism, injustice, and inspiration. But one moment made such an impression that it marks the beginning of his first autobiography, *A Choice of Weapons* (originally published in 1965), and features prominently in every subsequent autobiographical statement. Here is Parks's description of that moment in San Quentin prison, at the end of his assignment for "The Atmosphere of Crime":

> We are standing silent in the safe quarter of this pale green gas chamber. There are twelve of us and a cocky young guard; his orders splinter my thoughts: "Don't move around—don't gesture—don't talk aloud—obey commands promptly." Now, for some unaccountable reason, the guard is motioning me down front—to within three feet of the waiting chair. From here, only a thick glass will separate me from the death we have agreed to witness. Close behind us a minister leafs his Bible for words to say at the appropriate time.
>
> The color of the walls seems so incompatible with the occasion. Why not a somber gray, or, better still, black?
>
> The door to the death cubicle is opening. The quiet is heavy, and I damn myself for accepting the warden's invitation. But it's too late for that now; the doomed man is already coming, ashen and shaking, flanked by three beefy guards. He is dressed in blue prison denim, wears gray flannel bedroom slippers and moves with a hesitant shuffle as they guide him through the door.[24]

Parks describes in horrifying detail his impression of each step of the execution, until, as he puts it simply, "it is over." There is no question that the work for this story held unique significance for Parks: his photographs of this death chamber capture its sterility, while betraying little of the underlying emotion that percolates to the surface every time he recounts his life story.[25]

Several decades later, Parks would recall: "With the publication of that essay came invitations to speak before groups concerned with the problems of crime and ways to

fight them. Against a mature judgment I accepted a few. But I had no reassuring answers; I too was begging the questions, eating the same despair."[26] And while it is true that this assignment left an indelible mark on him, it is equally true that Parks engaged with the subject of crime across his career, from the story "Harlem Gang Leader" to his hugely influential feature film, *Shaft*, released in 1971. As a society, we are still searching for answers, but looking at and learning from Parks is as valuable an exercise today as it was when these photographs were first published, now more than sixty years ago.

1. [John N.] Thorne, [Don] Underwood, and [William K.] Zinsser to Philip Wootton, "Re: Crime Series #1," May 27, 1957, 1. Time Inc. Subject Files, MS 3009-RG 1-Box 436-F4, New-York Historical Society.

2. To name a few recent examples in New York City alone, consider Hank Willis Thomas and Dr. Baz Dreisinger's installation on the High Line, *The Writing on the Wall* (October 31–November 10, 2019); *The Pencil Is a Key: Drawings by Incarcerated Artists* at the Drawing Center (October 11, 2019–January 5, 2020); Elizabeth Breiner's *The Criminal Type* at apexart (September 7–November 16, 2019); and *Mirror/Echo/Tilt*, a performance and pedagogical project by Melanie Crean, Shaun Leonardo, and Sable Elyse Smith, at the New Museum (June 18–October 6, 2019).

3. Gean Moreno and Natalia Zuluaga, "Time Looting," in Risa Puleo, ed., *Walls Turned Sideways: Artists Confront the Justice System* (Miami: [NAME], in association with the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2018), 14.

4. For more information on Cameron Rowland's exhibition at Artists Space on view from January 17 to March 13, 2016, see https://artistsspace.org/exhibitions/cameron-rowland.

5. Thomas Byrnes, "Why Thieves Are Photographed," in *Professional Criminals of America* (1886; repr., New York: Lyons Press, 2000), 55.

6. Byrnes, "Preface," *Professional Criminals of America*, v.

7. Shawn Michelle Smith, "The Mug Shot: A Brief History," *Aperture* 230 (Spring 2018), 31.

8. Barbara Kruger, wall text for *Picturing "Greatness,"* The Museum of Modern Art (January 14–April 17, 1988).

9. Press release for *The Photo Essay* (March 16–May 16, 1965). "Harlem Gang Leader" was featured on one of two projectors, along with Wayne Miller's "Childbirth" (*U.S. Camera*, 1949), Margaret Bourke-White's "A New Way to Look at the U.S." (*Life*, April 14, 1952), Henri Cartier-Bresson's "The People of Russia: Travel in the U.S.S.R.," Part I (*Life*, January 17, 1955), and other *Life* photo essays.

10. John Szarkowski, "Acknowledgments," *From the Picture Press* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 2. Szarkowski noted also: "A major portion of the preliminary picture research was done by the late Diane Arbus and by Carole Kismaric. The quality of the pictures reproduced here is in large measure a tribute to their eyes and understanding."

11. *Pictures of the Times: A Century of Photography from the* New York Times (June 27–October 8, 1996), organized by Peter Galassi and Susan Kismaric, is another example of this.

12. Parks generously gave these five works in honor of Edward Steichen, director of the Department of Photography at MoMA from 1947 until 1961. Steichen had included Parks's work in three exhibitions: *In and Out of Focus: A Survey of Today's Photography* (1948), *Memorable* Life *Photographs* (1951), and *The Family of Man* (1955).

13. Thorne, Underwood, and Zinsser to Wootton, "Re: Crime Series #1," 21.

14. *Life*, August 12, 1957, 100.

15. These were followed quite closely. "A Really Good Police Force" became part 2 (September 16, 1957); "The Qualities of Justice," part 3 (September 23); "The Paradox of the Prisons," part 4 (September 30); "What Makes a Criminal," part 5 (October 7); and "The Crooks in White Collars," part 6 (October 14). The editors were aware of the critical role photography would play: "In order to start the series off with something really spectacular, and to meet Wootton's request for 10 pages of four-color, we would like to try a full-scale photographic color essay on The Atmosphere of Crime. The impact of this story will depend entirely on the excellence of its pictures. It should be shot by one or two photographers, working mainly with the police, and it should endeavor to give an impressionistic feeling of the dingy world of crime. As far as we know, this has never been tried in color; color would add a new and exciting dimension." Thorne, Underwood, and Zinsser to Wootton, "Re: Crime Series #1."

16. "Harlem Gang Leader," *Life*, November 1, 1948, 96–106.

17. Stanley Rayfield to the *Life* Staff, "The story behind the stories in *Life* – Issue of September 9, 1957," September 1957. Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3-Box 517-F11, New-York Historical Society.

18. "Restraints: Open and Hidden," *Life*, September 24, 1956, 98–109.

19. Robert Wallace, "Crime in the U.S.," *Life*, September 9, 1957, 47.

20. Wallace, "Crime in the U.S.," 48.

21. Thorsten Sellin, quoted in Wallace, "Crime in the U.S.," 67.

22. Wallace, "Crime in the U.S.," 68.

23. Gordon Parks, "At the Service: Thoughts on the White Conscience," in "'A Man Who Tried to Love Somebody,'" *Life*, April 19, 1968, 30.

24. Gordon Parks, "Prologue," *A Choice of Weapons* (1966; repr., Minneapolis: Minneapolis Historical Society Press, 2010), xvii.

25. Versions of this story appear in Parks's books *Born Black: A Personal Report on the Decade of Black Revolt 1960–1970* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1971), where chapter 1, "Death at San Quentin," is dated February 1960, perhaps to justify its inclusion in a book intended to focus on the 1960s; *To Smile in Autumn: A Memoir* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), where chapter 12, "Execution at San Quentin," recasts the story as a series of diary entries from August 1960 [*sic*] describing his experiences in Chicago and at San Quentin with *Life* reporter Henry Suydam; *Voices in the Mirror: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), where chapter 15 also includes this anecdote about a Chicago police officer who enabled the photographs on *Life*'s pages: "In a matter of minutes he had supplied the dope, the needle and the junkie—even a dark room in the back of the precinct" (174); *Half Past Autumn: A Retrospective* (Boston: Bulfinch, 1997), 180ff; and *A Hungry Heart: A Memoir* (New York: Atria, 2005), chap. 27.

26. Parks, *Voices in the Mirror*, 177.

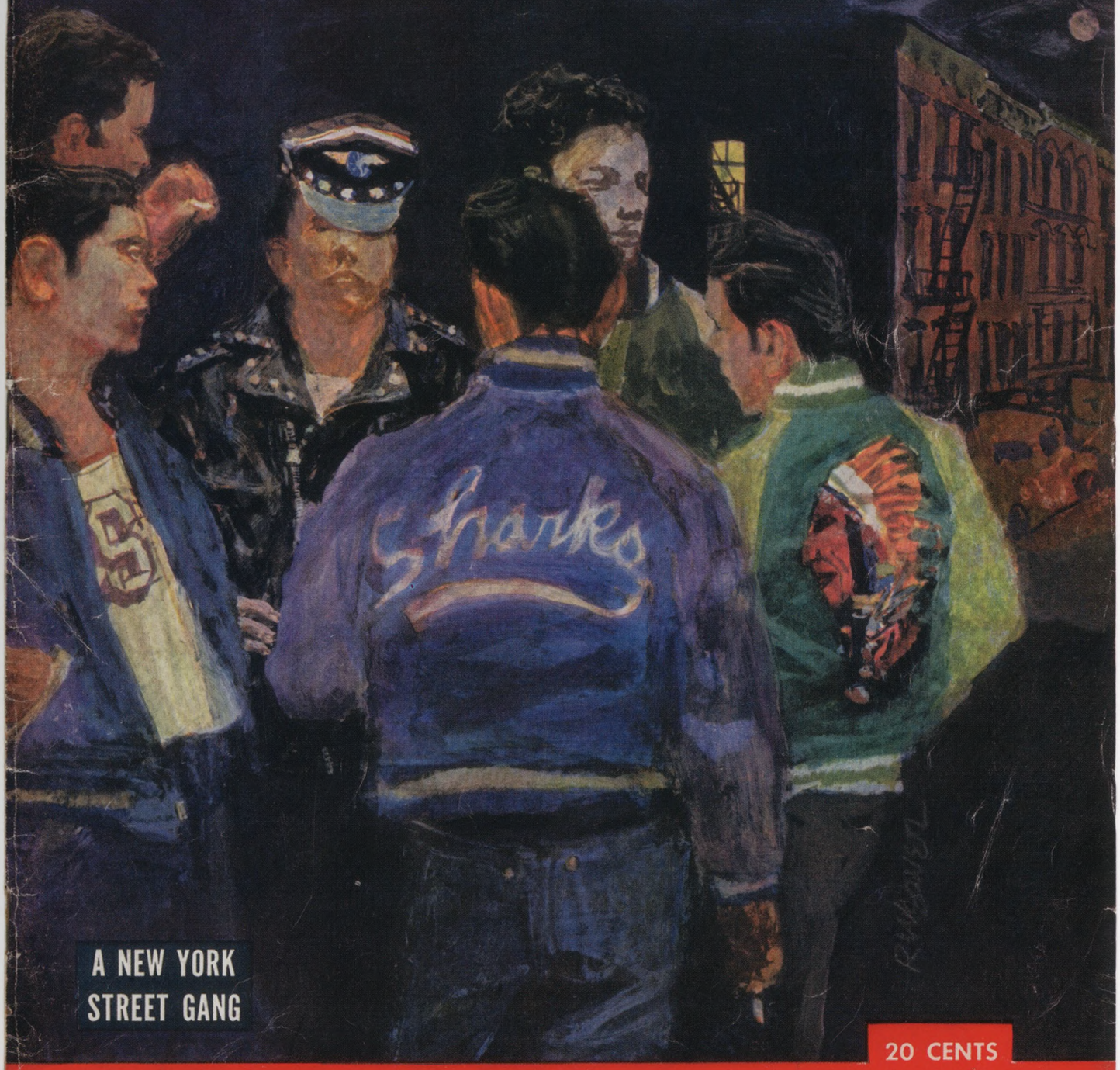
Life, September 9, 1957
"Crime in the U.S." and
"The Atmosphere of Crime"

LIFE

BEGINNING A MAJOR 'LIFE' SERIES

CRIME IN THE U.S.

PARENTS AND TEEN-AGERS
DEBATE 'GOING STEADY'



A NEW YORK
STREET GANG

20 CENTS

SEPTEMBER 9, 1957

Closing in on a known criminal on Chicago's South Side, police in a scout car check tensely by radio with headquarters. City lights rainbow the storm-splattered windshield as the car approaches the hideout.

THE EDITORS OF

LIFE

PRESENT A NEW SERIES

CRIME IN THE U.S.

With this article LIFE begins a major investigation of one of today's major problems—crime in the U.S. This first instalment deals with the great problems of measuring crime and pinning it down. The parts that follow will discuss the methods of coping with it—how the criminal is caught and what makes a good police force; how a complex structure of laws and courts tries to render him justice; how he is punished and what efforts are made to help him reform; what psychological pressures may have got him into trouble in the first place. The sixth and final part will deal with the modern "white collar" criminal. The articles will be complemented with pictorial essays by artists and photographers.

The cries of 'Crime Wave' grow louder but effective counterattack is delayed because we do not use modern way of pinning down facts

by ROBERT WALLACE

THE nation in the fall of 1957 appears to be threatened by a catastrophic wave of crime. From almost every major city in the past year have come frightening reports showing not merely an increase in the number of crimes but a dreadful shift, it seems, in their nature. Incredible brutality is the prime characteristic of contemporary murders. The vandalism of juveniles is no longer understandable even to the most indulgent and soft-minded adults but has become savage and wanton beyond belief. The decline of morality in business, politics and sex is everywhere observed.

In New York City there have been 26 juvenile murders thus far this year. One of these, occurring in midsummer, had a feature so repulsive that even the most hard-bitten police could scarcely believe it. The victim was a 15-year-old boy who had once had polio and could not run fast. He was set upon by a teen-age gang and stabbed to death for no apparent reason. Among his assailants was a creature, he later told police, who had always wanted to know what it would feel like to plunge a knife through human bone. After he had thrust his knife so deeply into his victim's back that its point nearly emerged through his chest, he glanced down and said, "Thanks a lot."

In Brockton, Mass., also in midsummer, there occurred another spectacularly repulsive crime. To the outraged people of New England it seemed far worse than New York's juvenile murder because it could, it seemed, have been predicted and prevented. The victims were two brothers, 11 and 12, who had gone for a swim in a public pond and had disappeared. Police, searching for them, found their naked bodies partially hidden in some bushes near the pond. They had been killed by stabbing and then some attempt had been made to cremate them. Near the bodies lay a key, which was presently found to match the door lock of a 20-year-old man named Raymond Ohlson. In checking Ohlson's record the police found the following facts: that in 1949 he had been brought before a judge and charged with an assault on a 3-year-old boy but had been released in the custody of his parents; that in 1950 he had been charged with an assault, involving intent to murder, on a 12-year-old boy and had been given a 10-year sentence. With four years of his sentence remitted for good behavior, he was released last June, one month before he committed his double murder.

The dismal pattern of the Ohlson case—the known, predictable criminal turned loose upon society after time off for "good behavior"—is familiar to the entire nation.

Current reports of crime are not confined to murders. In the past eight months the parade of arrogant, snarling labor racketeers before the McClellan committee has revolted everyone who has read of it. The California trial of correspondents of *Confidential* magazine involves a whole spectrum of crime. Individual prosecutions may never be made because of it, but the public testimony reeks of vicious, criminal libel; of adultery and prostitution; of blackmail and perjury and a half-dozen other crimes of which 20th Century Americans seem not only capable but fond.

Is it really a 'wave'?

THE list of crimes and criminal conditions of 1957 could be expanded to enormous length. But the list would still be largely a compilation of reports from the nation's press. A thoughtful man might question whether they are true evidence that a "crime wave" is in progress—perhaps they are only "normal" behavior for the present society. Is there better evidence? Are there some statistics, some comparative figures that may indicate what the trend really is?

Since 1930 the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been collecting and tabulating reports of crimes from every corner of the nation. Twice

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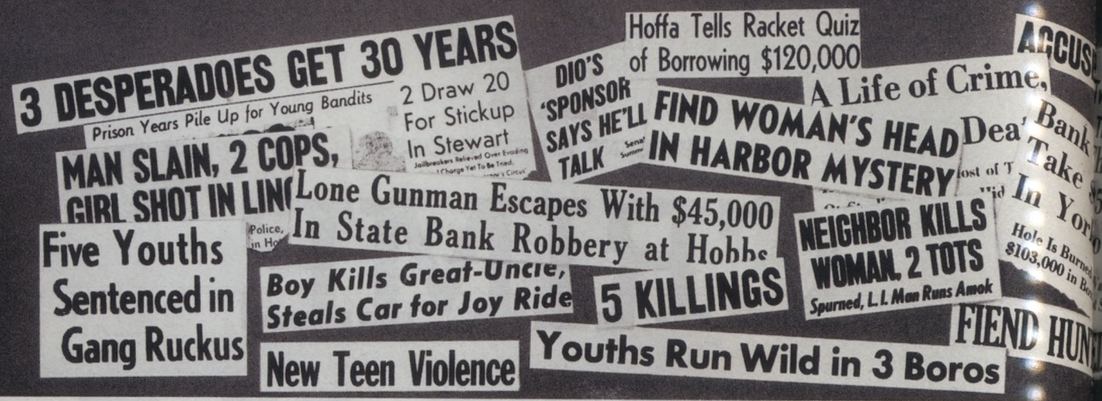

3 DESPERADOES GET 30 YEARS
Prison Years Pile Up for Young Bandits
2 Draw 20 For Stickup In Stewart
MAN SLAIN, 2 COPS, GIRL SHOT IN LIN
Five Youths Sentenced in Gang Ruckus
Hoffa Tells Racket Quiz of Borrowing $120,000
DIO'S 'SPONSOR SAYS HE'LL TALK
FIND WOMAN'S HEAD IN HARBOR MYSTERY
A Life of Crime,
Lone Gunman Escapes With $45,000 In State Bank Robbery at Hobbs
Boy Kills Great-Uncle, Steals Car for Joy Ride
5 KILLINGS
NEIGHBOR KILLS WOMAN, 2 TOTS
Spurned, L.I. Man Runs Amok
New Teen Violence
Youths Run Wild in 3 Boros
FIEND HUNT

KIDNAPER CAPTURED
Two Policemen Hurt Trying to Quell Gang
Wild Spree Crime
Teen Crime
'MAN HUNTED
AS BOYS' KILLER
PROBE DEATH OF LADY SLEUTH
$100,000 Suspect Nabbed in Tulsa
YOUTH CRIME RISE IS HELD MAGNIFIED
Police Move to Curb Rowdies at Drive-ins
RACKET TIES
Carpenter Found Sane; Must Die In The Chair
Round Up 24
WAGNER SUMMONS MEETING TUESDAY ON GANG VIOLENCE
Bandits Terrorize, Rob Couple of $8
SADIST VICTIM: 'THIS IS THE MAN'
GIRL BEATER HANGS SELF

FROM NEW YORK TO LOS ANGELES, FROM CHICAGO TO MIAMI, THE NATION'S AUGUST NEWSPAPER HEADLINES SCREAM ABOUT YOUTH CRIME, BANK ROBBERIES, OF MURDERS, KIDNAPINGS AND LABOR RACKETEERING, OF FIENDS AND SADISTS AND DESPERADOES, AND OF POLICE ACTION

a year the FBI releases its figures in booklets called Uniform Crime Reports. If these reports confirm the impression that a crime wave actually is in progress, certainly the time has come to take a long, close look at the problem.

The U.S., said FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover a few weeks ago, is in the midst of "an ever mounting wave of crime." The Bureau's statistics reveal an almost unbroken succession of increases in crimes per year since the end of World War II. All manner of crimes, not merely certain categories, are listed with rapidly rising frequency. Homicides, rapes, assaults, robberies, burglaries and car thefts all increased enormously in number from 1946 to 1956. "Major crimes reached a new high in 1956," says the FBI's report. "Increases in seven of eight categories brought a record 2,563,150 major crimes for the year. This is 13.3% above 1955 and the first total above the 2.5 million mark." One particularly startling comparison can be made in the FBI's estimation of the number of major crimes in 1946 and in 1956. In the first year after the war there were 1,685,203; a decade later the figure was 2,563,150, an increase of 40%.

Can there be any doubt that these figures show that a crime wave exists? What should—or can—be done about it?

There are two conspicuous courses. The first is to get tough, to rise up in righteous indignation and try to teach the criminal population a lesson it will never forget. This course, which has been taken at many times and places in the past, is now being followed in New York. Many eminent citizens, including one judge, have proposed that a curfew be imposed on the city's youths whereby teen-agers must be off the streets by 10:30 p.m. or face arrest. The mayor, reacting to great pressure from the press, has ordered that the entire current class of rookie policemen, 536 men, be assigned to night beats while they complete their studies during the day. The governor of the state has offered to give whatever aid he can to the troubled city. A police commissioner has announced that he will meet force with lawful force—obstreperous juveniles may expect to have their skulls cracked.

The second approach to the problem of crime is, for the moment, to take no extraordinary action at all but merely to think about it, to question every statement, "fact" and "statistic," and to try to build up an accurate picture of what may—or may not—be happening. This approach may seem mistily academic to the individual victim of a mugging attack, who would prefer to have the assailant removed from his back, not tabulated. But it has something to recommend it: it has, surprisingly, not often been tried, whereas the get-tough approach has been employed not merely for years but for centuries with only small success.

'Ah sinful nation'

THE thoughtful approach begins with a backward look. "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence," said the author of Genesis more than 4,000 years ago. "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters," cried the prophet Isaiah in 700 B.C. "How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgement; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. . . ."

It may be argued that the great men of the Old Testament took an unnecessarily jaundiced view of life. They wrote jeremiads but had never seen a zip-gun. To those who doubt the validity of the ancient complaints, it may seem reasonable to move a little closer to the present.

"The increase of crime is becoming one of the most startling notices of our daily newspapers. Of that fact there can be no doubt. Three, four, five and in one case eight murders are announced for New York for one week. We are becoming familiar with what, 20 years ago, would have shocked the universal conscience." —*Harper's Magazine*, 1853.

Again it may be argued that some bilious magazine editor, writing a century ago, really had no idea. Mid-19th Century America was a fine and noble place, whence came all the good old-fashioned principles ignored today. Perhaps it would be well to move even closer to the present.

"The city challenged by crime: There was a vile and atrocious crime committed up on Washington Heights. The average law-abiding citizen . . . can feel only a sickening sense of shock. . . . To be specific New York has a crime problem. So has every other big city. The most serious part of it is crime by the young. And if this alarming growth isn't checked at the beginning, the result may well be that there won't be enough prisons to hold all the criminals. Obviously the time to act is right now."—New York *Herald Tribune*, 1957.

It may be that the last statement is really the valid one, and that the earlier ones were merely yawps by alarmists who did not know how well off they were. However there are men who will debate the point. One of these is Ralph W. Whelan, executive director of the New York City Youth Board, which is deeply concerned with the problem of juvenile delinquency. It recently occurred to Mr. Whelan to point out that many "crime waves" are subjective in origin: three or four isolated incidents of crime may become associated in a man's mind, and he may therefore believe that disaster is at hand.

Mr. Whelan, when he made this innocent statement to the press a month ago, knew that logic was on his side. He knew, for example, that whereas there have been 22 juvenile murders in New York in the first six months of 1957, there were 29 in the like period in 1956. He knew also that in other recent years the figures have been even more disturbing. So Mr. Whelan referred to New York's "crime wave" as "an almost hysterical situation" created by the press and added that he thought the idea of a juvenile curfew was silly. For saying these things, Mr. Whelan was promptly flogged by the editorial writers. One belt at him, also in the *Herald Tribune*, ran for 350 words but can be summed up, perhaps a little roughly although not unfairly, in three. "Shut up, Whelan," it said.

The experience of Mr. Whelan and the quotations from the Bible and *Harper's* are not mentioned for the purpose of minimizing the state of crime in the U.S. today. Crime does exist and is widespread. There may indeed be a national wave of it, and if there is, it is a deadly serious problem. But hopefully, if it can be borne in mind that crime has always seemed at its dreadful peak to all generations and that calm men have often been ridiculed for making moderate statements about it, the discussion can get on to a basic point: statistics. Therein lies the core of the matter. But who knows something about criminal statistics?

The foremost authority on criminal statistics in the country, and perhaps in the world, is Dr. Thorsten Sellin, a name generally unknown to criminals or to the law-abiding public. Even when it is added that the name, which is Swedish, is pronounced Sel-*lean*, there will be no flurry of recognition.

Dr. Sellin is head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania and has spent more than 30 years studying criminal statistics. He has written a great many basic works on the subject, although none has been in the best-seller class. Mainly they are small essays and monographs which appear in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* and similar publications. The essays have modest titles: "A Few Observations on the Statistics of Juvenile Delinquency" is a typical example. But smallness and modesty are sometimes deceptive; Dr. Sellin's few observations are blockbusters. One of them, certainly, will startle people who have grown used to the idea that all things American, particularly in the field of the punch-card and the electronic computer, of automation and the efficiency expert, are necessarily good. "The U.S.," says Dr. Sellin, "has the worst criminal statistics of any major country in the Western world."

Because he believes that the nation's criminal statistics are so poor, Sellin believes also that it is extremely difficult to tell whether national crime rates are trending upward, downward or sidewise. The phrase "crime wave" is meaningless to him, unless the reference is to the one big crime wave that began when Cain killed Abel, and continues. But it is no light matter to dismiss most American criminal statistics out of hand; there must be some justification for doing so.

"National statistics are simply composites of local statistics," Sellin says, "so let's take a look at some local statistics. Consider two things that happened in the U.S. in 1950. The first took place in New York City, which had a fantastic 'crime wave.' Burglaries, which had been reported previously at a fairly steady figure of about 250 a month, suddenly began to be reported at the figure of 1,000 a month. Then it was 2,000, and I believe eventually 4,000. What on earth happened?

A wave of good behavior

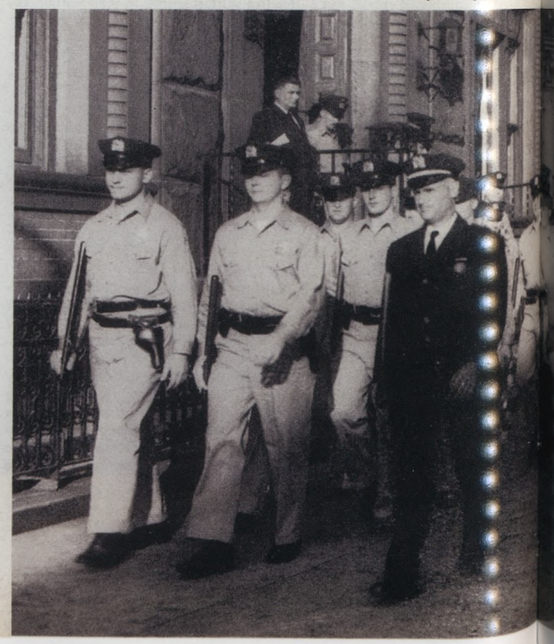
THE other interesting statistics of 1950 came from California. While New York had its crime wave, California had a wave of good behavior. The rates of murder, assault, burglary, larceny, all the major crimes, went sharply down, some as much as 35% or 40%. What happened?"

Is there some invaluable lesson to be learned from the California experience? What did the police or the citizens do to reduce crime so suddenly and considerably? Unfortunately there is no lesson. What happened in California was that the federal government, as it does every 10 years, took a census.

California's crime rates, Sellin points out, were based on units of 100,000 of population, like the crime rates of all other states and cities. In 1949, for example, the rate of murder in California was 4.97 per 100,000. Robbery stood at 136.1, theft at 2141.6, and so on. During the decade 1940–1950 the population of California grew enormously, from seven million to 10.5 million, a gain of 50%. But because there were no correct population figures available for intercensal years, all of the crimes committed in every year from 1940–1949 were attributed to the population of 1940. When the new census was taken in 1950 the crime rates were adjusted accordingly and there was a spectacular "decrease" in crime.

Crime rates in the nation as a whole also "decreased" in 1950, for the same reason. In 2,297 cities with a total population of 69 million the rate of every major crime was "lower" in 1950 than it had been a year before. However, although the rates were down, the volume was up because the

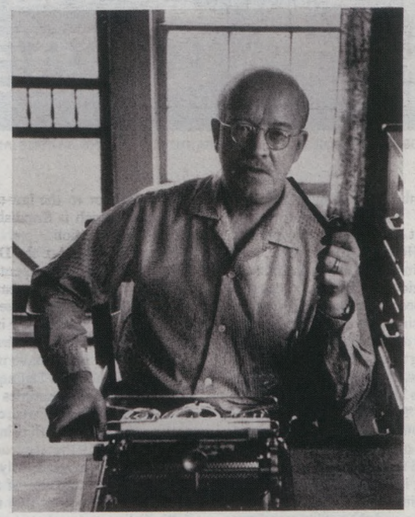
EMERGENCY REINFORCEMENTS against outbreak of juvenile gang violence, rookie cops march out of station house in New York City to help the regular police. More than 500 rookies, augmenting a regular city force of 23,722 cops, were assigned to patrol areas where incidence of crime was high.



population had increased. It was this fact that received attention in the press releases of the year. "Every five minutes during 1950 someone in the United States was feloniously assaulted or killed," the FBI's report said. "The total volume of crime in 1950 was up 1.5% across the nation with all individual offense classes showing increases except robbery."

Dr. Sellin has no quarrel with the FBI; quite to the contrary. He is merely depressed over the handling of press releases and the misplacement of emphasis, which is not the fault of the FBI but of human nature.

What happened in New York City in 1950 is a shorter and simpler story. New York got a new police commissioner, Thomas Murphy, who examined police practices in reporting crime and discovered that they were not good. The reporting was done on a precinct basis, with each precinct captain competing with the others. The fewer crimes that were reported, particularly the fewer unsolved crimes, the better each captain looked. Commissioner Murphy put the reporting on a centralized basis and ordered all captains to report all crimes whether they were solved or not. The result naturally was that the total number of crimes reported went up and New York promptly had a "crime wave."



DR. THORSTEN SELLIN, 60, of University of Pennsylvania, is one of world's outstanding authorities on crime statistics.

Sellin can point to many other "crime waves" and "decreases" in all parts of the country over past years. In the Prohibition decade in his own city of Philadelphia, for example, it suddenly appeared that the population had taken, en masse, to drink. Drunks by the hundreds and the thousands were booked by the police. Consternation reigned in the public bosom. But what had happened? What had happened was that Smedley Butler, the famous retired Marine general who believed that all lawbreakers should be booked, had become police commissioner. In the past, police practice in dealing with drunks had been simply to pry them off the sidewalk and take them home. Under Butler police were instructed to pry the drunks off the sidewalk and book them for public intoxication. This small change in policy, and the relative triviality of public intoxication as a crime, may seem unworthy of notice in a discussion of the big national problem. But it is of real importance. Of the 2,070,794 arrests throughout the U.S. last year about 800,000 were for public intoxication and another 200,000 were for disorderly conduct, generally the same thing. What do these arrest figures mean? That there are more or fewer Smedley Butlers in office throughout the country? That there was more or less drunkenness in public? And what, if anything, has this to do with crime?

Local whimsies, national trends

THE FBI, in tabulating national criminal statistics, acts merely as a service organization. Whenever it can it takes local whimsies into account when it figures the national trend. But it has no control over the local collection of statistics and cannot always inculcate its own high standards in local authorities. For that reason the FBI is always careful to include this statement, indeed to underline it, in every Uniform Crime Report: "*In publishing the data sent in by chiefs of police in different cities, the FBI does not vouch for their accuracy. They are given out as current information which may throw some light on problems of crime and criminal law enforcement.*"

There are other reasons why data in the FBI's reports may not reflect an entirely accurate picture of national crime. The efficiency of many local police forces is constantly increasing. As this occurs better records are maintained and thus more crimes are reported. The policies of prosecuting officials and courts may change from time to time, as may the attitude of the public toward law-enforcement problems, thus creating "trends" in crime.

Even the definition of crime may change. Ordinarily, if moral, religious and philosophical considerations are properly set aside, crime is defined in the legal language of the law dictionary: A crime is "an act committed or omitted in violation of a public law forbidding or commanding it." This is the definition used by Sellin and most other students of the subject. But what is "public law" today may not have been public law yesterday and may not be tomorrow. New concepts and inventions—the automobile, for example—have profound effect upon public law, as do taxes, the growth of cities and many other things. Some years ago Harvard's famed dean of law, Roscoe Pound, made a study of this point in relation to the laws of a single state, Rhode Island. "When all are taken into account," Dean Pound concluded, "the number of crimes for which one may be prosecuted in Rhode Island has very much more than doubled in 50 years, and multiplied by eight in 100 years."

For the foregoing reasons the problem of the FBI, in tabulating and attempting to make sense out of statistics sent in by 6,595 police chiefs and agencies throughout the country, is a large one. For convenience, eight categories of crime are established as the backbone of each Uniform Crime Report: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter; manslaughter by negligence; rape; robbery; aggravated assault; burglary—breaking or entering; larceny—theft; and auto theft. An examination of a couple of these categories provides further ground for depression to a social scientist like Sellin, to whom a clear definition of terms is a basic necessity. "Murder" to the layman means, as a rule, first-degree murder: cold, premeditated killing. But within the category of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter are grouped not only first-degree (planned) but second-degree (unplanned) murder as well as voluntary manslaughter. In other words the range includes everything from so skillfully planned and executed a crime as the Chicago St. Valentine's Day massacre to so "crude" a crime as an ordinary street fight, in which one participant is knocked down, hits his head on the curb and dies. To Sellin it seems foolish to generalize that "murder" "increased" or "decreased" in any given year.

"In the category of rape are included both forcible and statutory rape," Sellin says. "In the latter case no force is involved but the victim, if that is the appropriate word, happens to be under a given age, perhaps 18. Is it wise to include both these crimes under one heading?" In the FBI's report for last year it appears that there were 15,225 cases of rape in the U.S., of which about 40% were statutory. The arbitrary figure 15,225 brings a wry grin to the face of Sellin, who recalls a conversation he had some years ago with the late Dr. Kinsey.

At the time of the conversation there were about 60 men in the Indiana State Prison serving sentence for rape. "How many cases of rape do you estimate there were in Indiana last year?" Sellin asked Kinsey.

"You mean instances of rape as defined by law, not individuals involved?" said Kinsey.

"Yes."

"Several million, certainly."

If Kinsey's estimate may be expanded to cover the nation, it would appear that there were not 15,225 instances of rape in 1956, but some astronomical number. It makes an interesting statistic for a Soviet propagandist writing in *Pravda* but, as Sellin says, what does it mean?

Another questionable category is that of car theft. It is thought that about 80% of car thefts are committed by juveniles, and it is known that almost all of the vehicles are recovered within a short time, usually undamaged. The idea of actually stealing the vehicle, appropriating it permanently for his own use or selling it, apparently does not often occur to the juvenile. A better term for car theft in such cases might be "unauthorized use," a crime to be sure, but perhaps not so serious as real theft. If unauthorized use of cars is increasing is it because there are more cars available today for the purpose? Is it because car owners are more careless about leaving keys in ignition locks? Is it because children learn to drive cars today at an earlier and more irresponsible age?

Sellin does not quarrel with all national statistics; some he thinks are good enough to be the basis of judgments about crime. Not all criminal homicides are discovered, he points out, but at least enough of them are brought to light to form a very large sample of the activity in the

TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 59
PICTURES ON NEXT EIGHT PAGES

A PROWL CAR HALTS IN A NEW YORK STREET. A YOUTH COMES NERVOUSLY TO ITS SIDE. "YOU CLEAN?" THE COP ASKS. "WE'RE WATCHING YOU."

THE ATMOSPHERE OF CRIME

On the surface the world of crime is much like the world of honest men: its setting is a busy street, a small hotel, a quiet apartment building. But underneath, this world has its own dark atmosphere. Its sounds are those of sirens, whistles, shattering doors, swift footsteps—and the ominous noise of silence. Its smell is the stale smell of city streets in summer, the reek of antiseptics and dried blood. Its denizens are men of prey and men of law, to many of whom a gun is a tool familiar as a fork. Things take on different meanings. To men engaged in crime and violence a roving police car is a threat, not reassurance. Safety lies in dark alleys, not in bright lights, and any sidewalk incident, instead of attracting a crowd, empties a block like lightning. It is a busy world and one without much pity, where police and criminals alike are hardened to sights of brutality. Into this world, to record the atmosphere of crime, LIFE sent Photographer Gordon Parks and Reporter Henry Suydam. For six weeks they toured the streets of New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles, sometimes alone, sometimes working closely with the police. Their portfolio of color pictures shows the nether world from its own point of view, with all its violence and stealth, its misery and death.

Photographed for LIFE by GORDON PARKS

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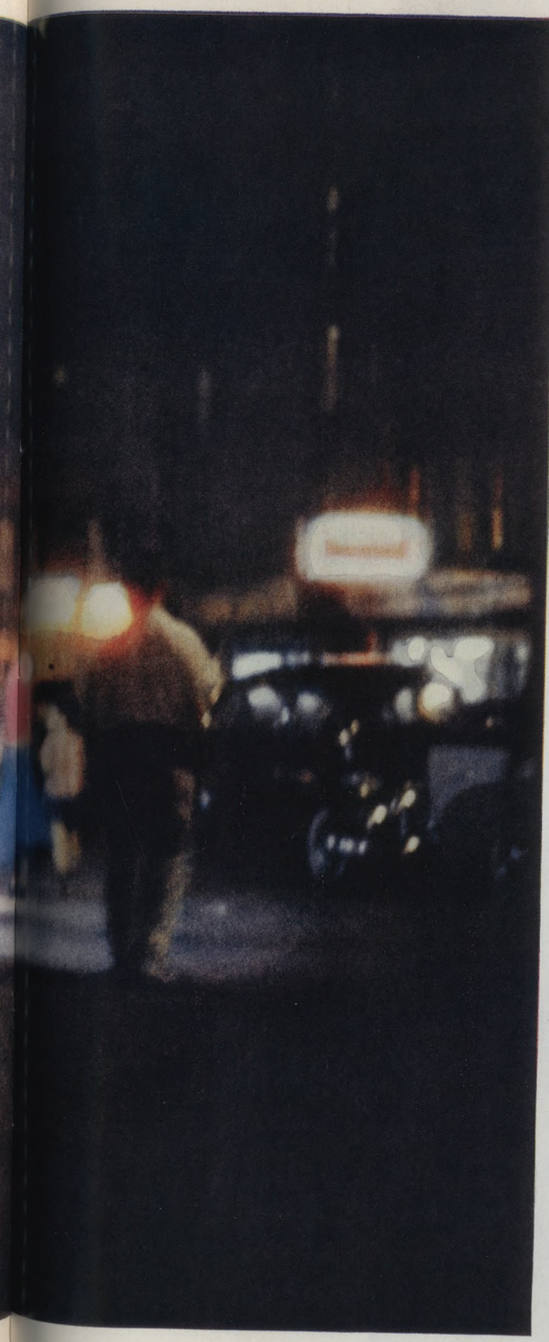
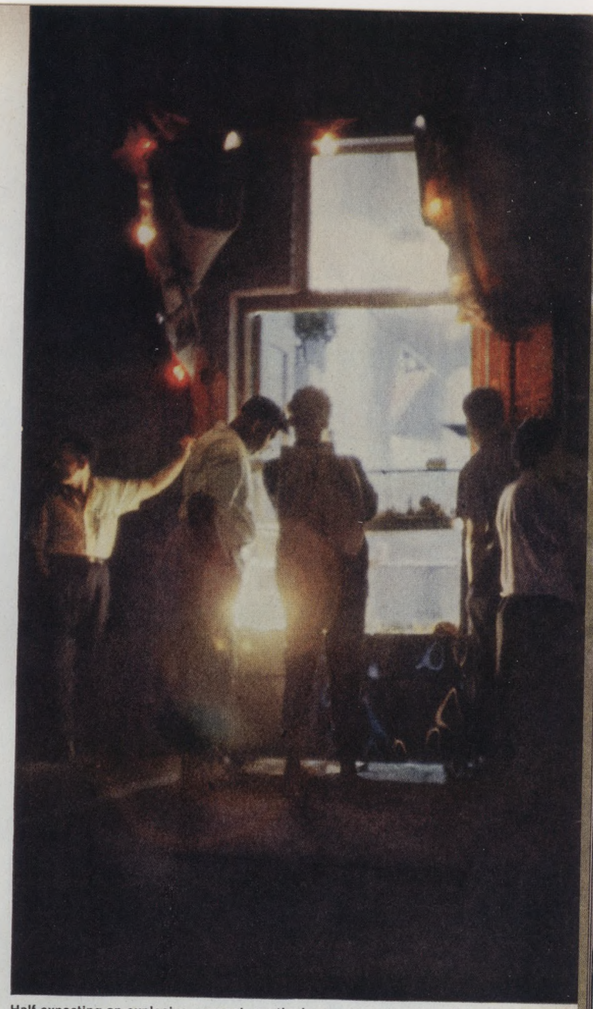
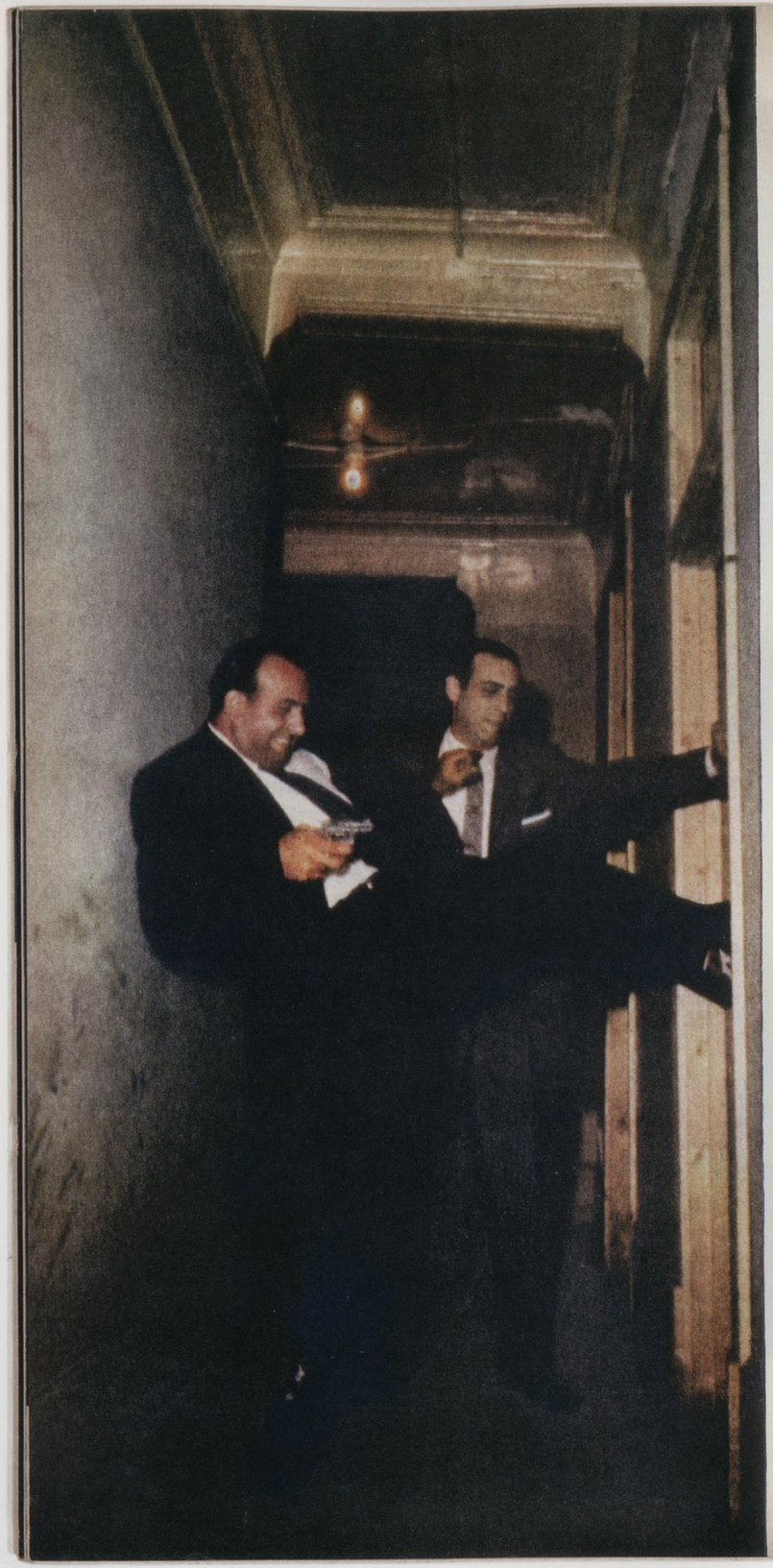
A furtive poker game whiles away a hot summer night on a tough sidewalk in New York. The beat cop has just passed, and the youths have time for a few more hands before he returns to break up the illegal game.



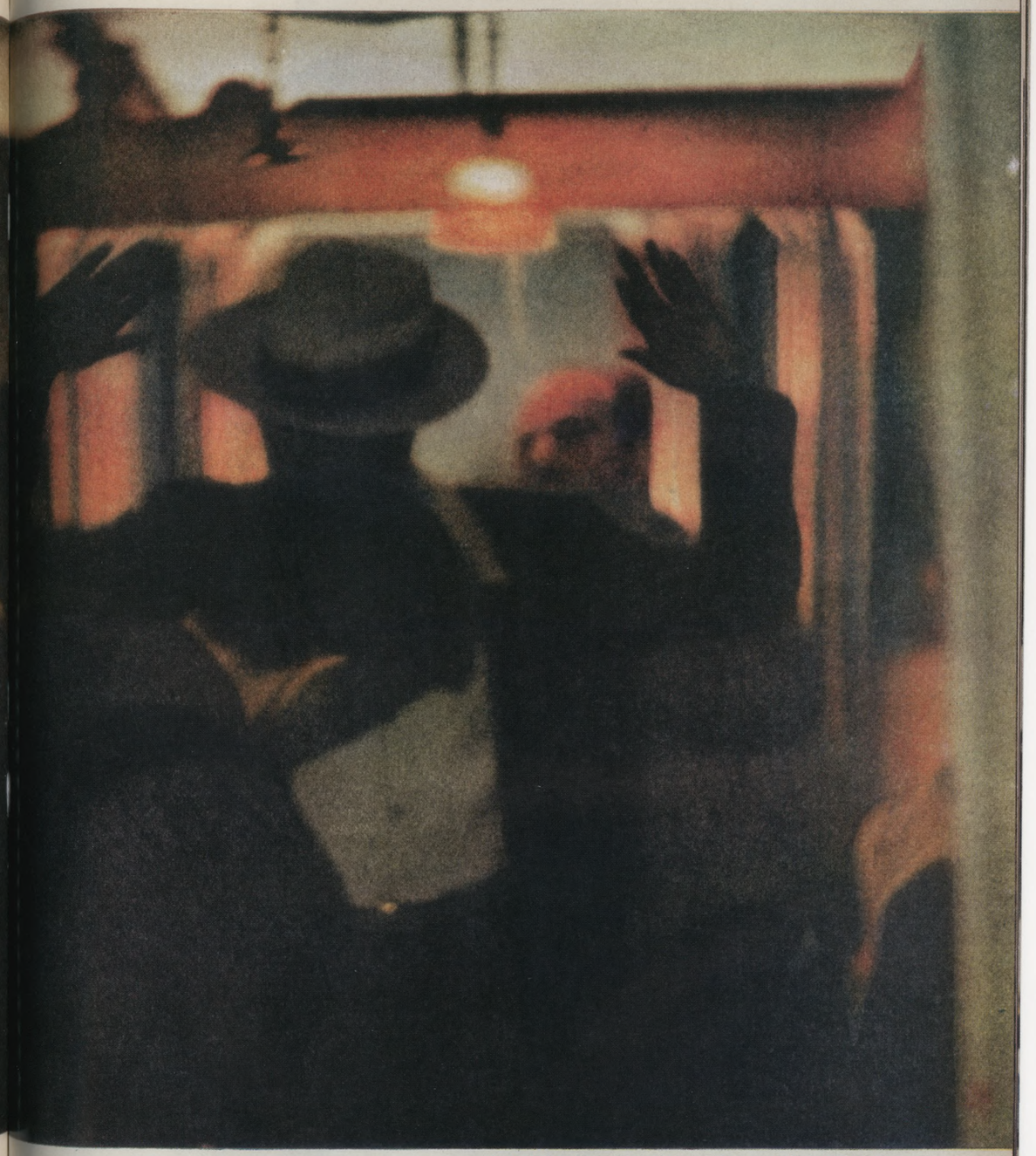
On North Clark Street, Chicago, four doors from where the St. Valentine's Day massacre took place, two suspects are herded into a police van. The calm arrest draws no crowd and barely interests the man on the porch.



Half expecting an explosive moment, youths lounge in a store-front light in New York's Puerto Rican district. Now they are bored. But someone is always kicking someone around, and they keep an eye on the dark.



Guns drawn, Chicago detectives break in the door of a suspicious room. Surprise means safety. A quick kick follows a perfunctory knock.



Hands high and trembling in the eerie light, a man is frisked by detectives. He knocked on the door of a criminal's apartment they were searching. They softly asked him in, then "Raise your hands. High. Frisk him."

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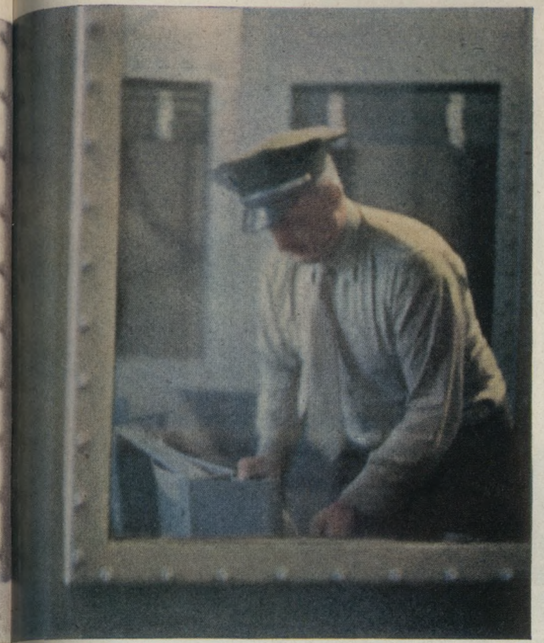
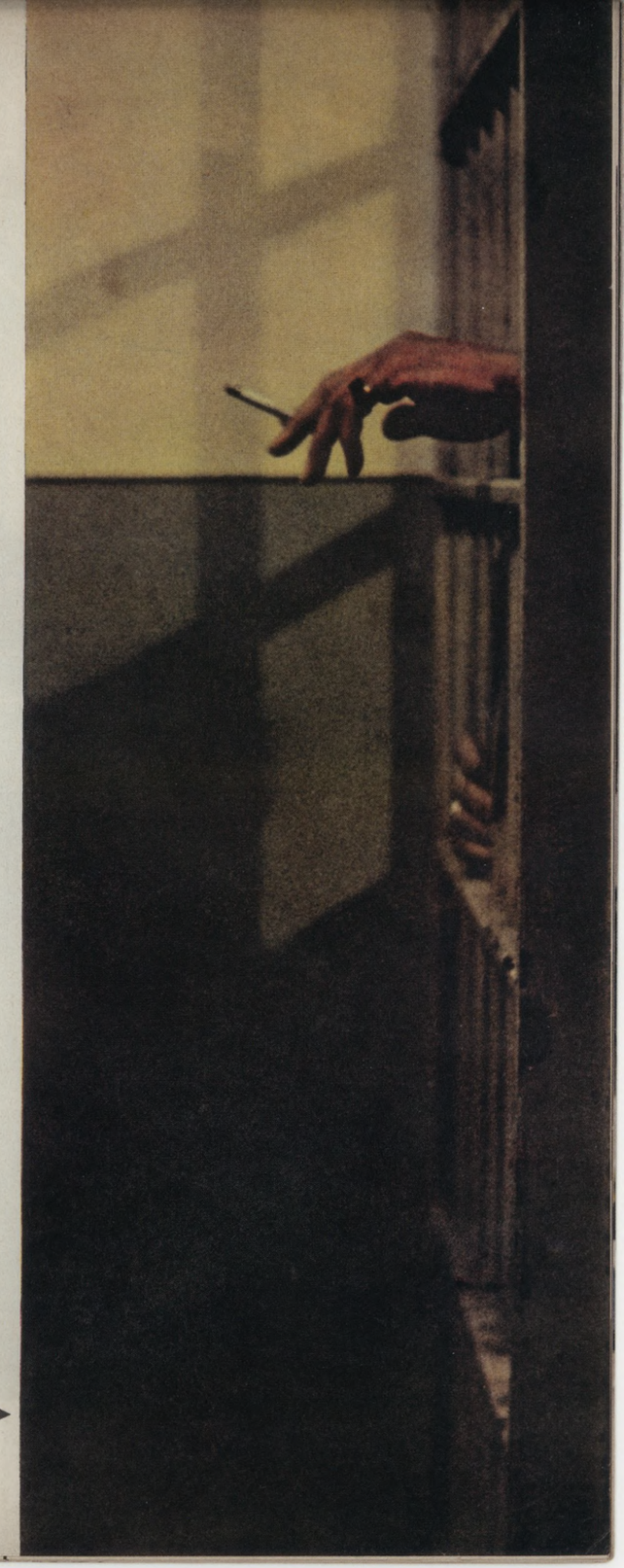
A sidewalk puddle reflects a common tragedy. A police van drives up to a Chicago hospital's emergency door with a knifing victim. Tired attendants, once compassionate, sit idly by.



San Quentin's gas chamber *(above)* is readied to take a life. Now a guard adjusts the chair in the too-clean room. Next day a hearse *(reflected in store window, below)* drives the dead murderer out.

The left hand of a man who knows the ropes nonchalantly dangles a cigaret through the bars of a Chicago prison. But the man's right hand, grasping the bars below, betrays him: he is frustrated and locked in. →



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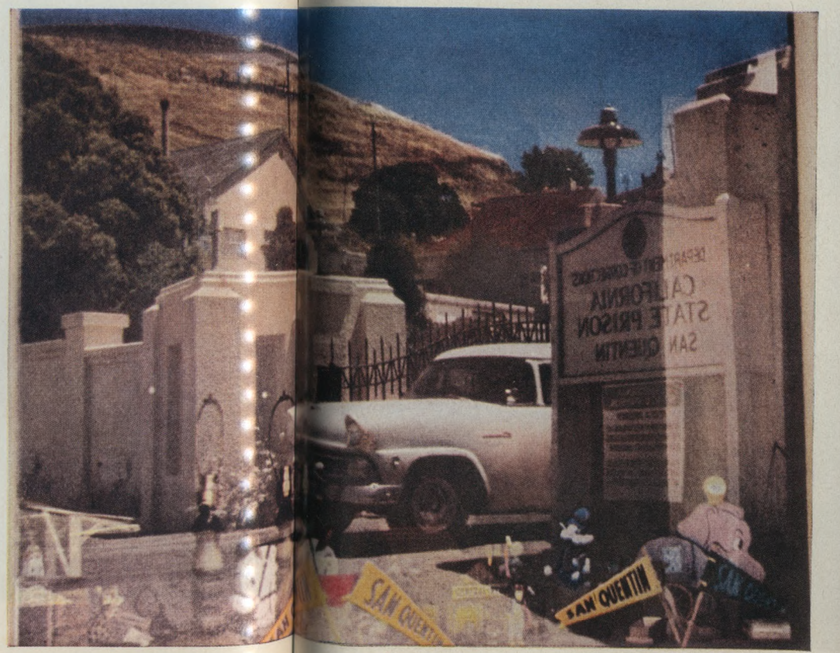

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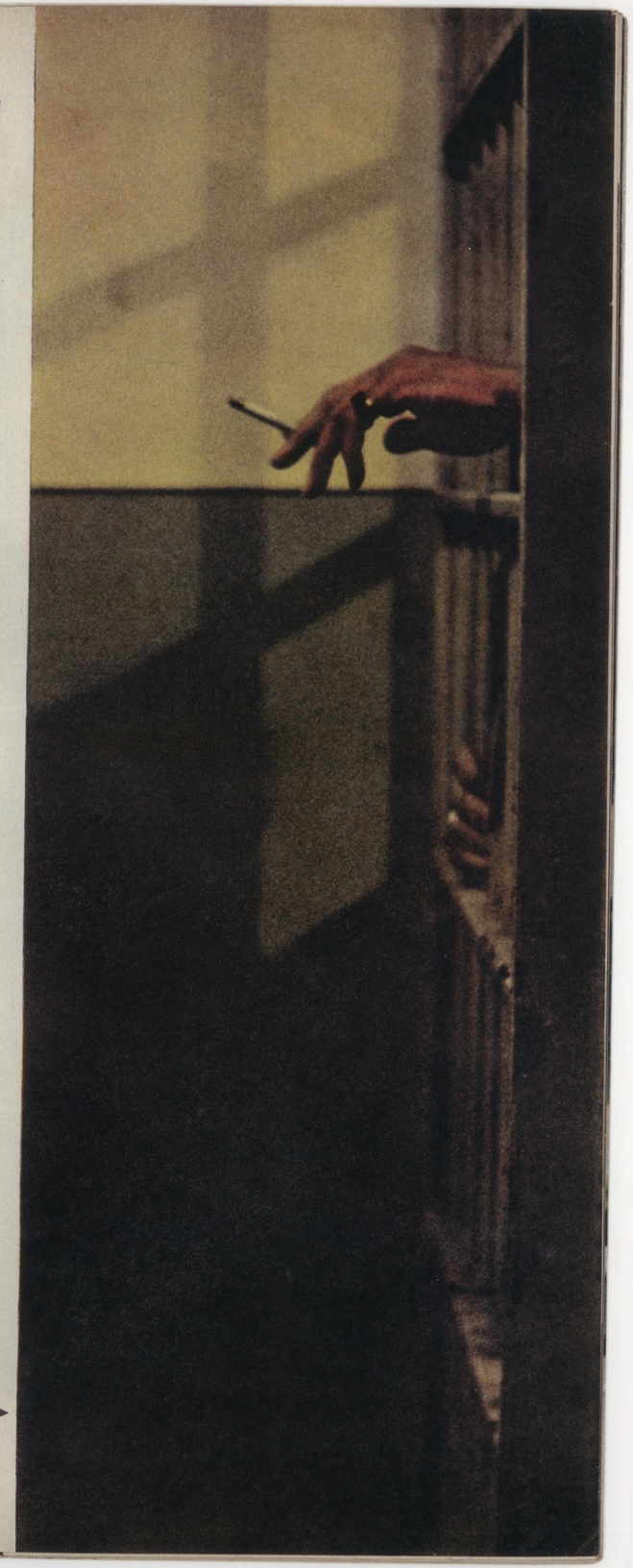
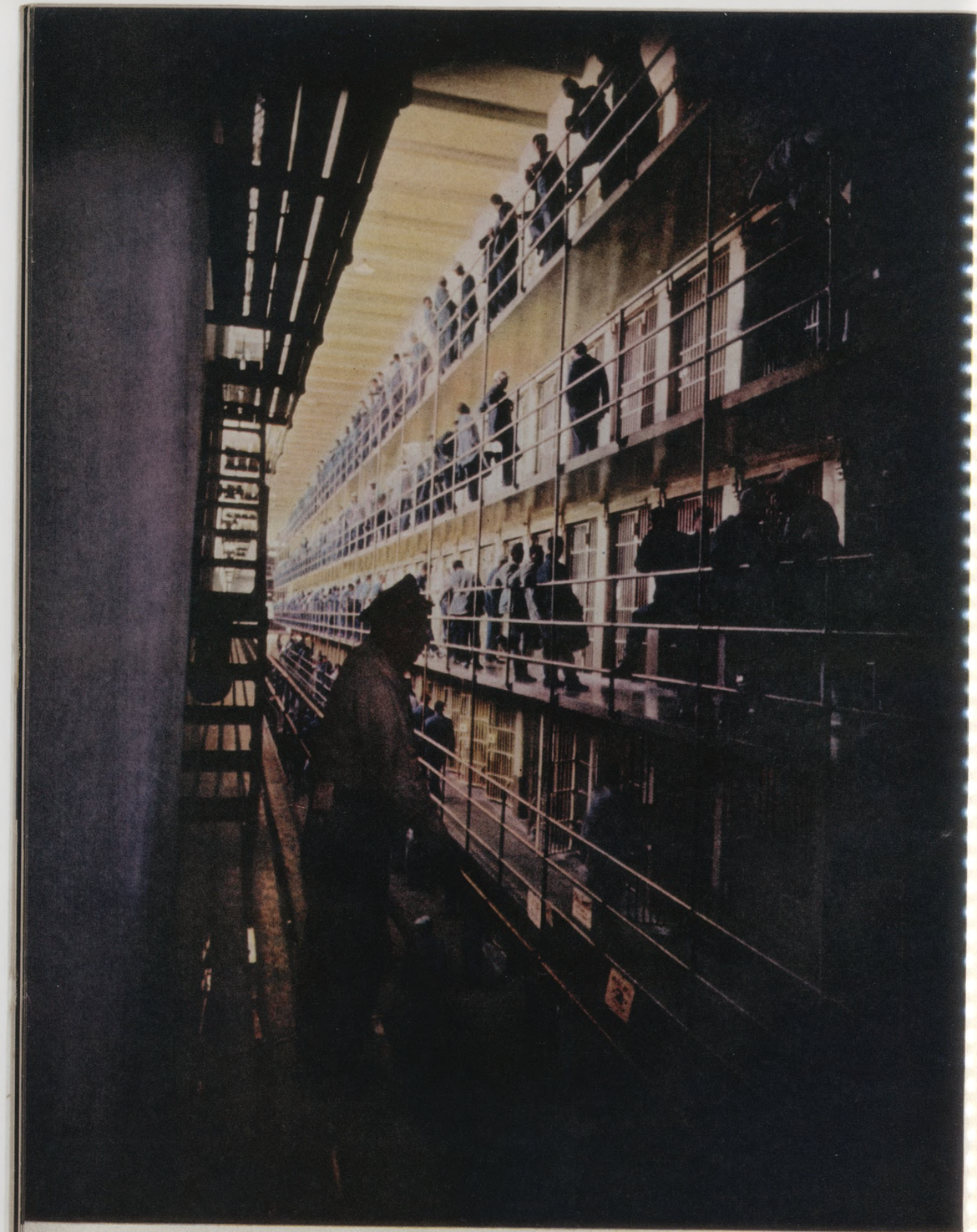
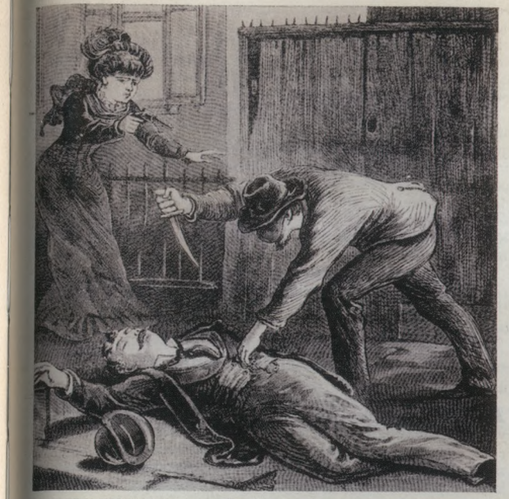




At the end of the day in San Quentin the prisoners file back to their cells, chatting, joking, strangely casual. An order is given. They shuffle in. There is a sudden great clang of the doors, then silence.



1845 CRIME WAVE as seen by *National Police Gazette* included an attack in which a lady saved her sweetheart, "discomfited a desperate footpad."

TEXT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 50

U.S. Thus it may be safe to generalize about homicide—and the generalization may be rather surprising to readers of newspaper crime stories: today the rate of homicide in the U.S. is lower than it was 25 years ago. In 1930 there were about 8.9 homicides per 100,000 of population, and in 1955 there were 4.6. But even regarding these figures, which seem to "prove" something, Sellin appends a question. "Today," he says, "medical techniques are improved, more ambulances and hospitals are available, and the lives of many people who might earlier have died from assault are being saved. What does this do to your statistics on homicide?"

As Sellin says, no one really knows for sure what the trends are in crime in the U.S. Crime is an age-old condition of society. It is not like the Colorado potato beetle, a menace one day and gone the next. But the problem cannot be dismissed with such a negative observation. Sellin is a constructive thinker. He has devoted much of his life to an effort to promote the collection of truly good statistics which can serve as a basis for action against crime. Legislators at the local, state or federal level, he thinks, must have reliable statistics before they can make sensible laws. "If a law is passed merely in response to public hysteria, to satisfy vocal groups which cry 'Crime wave!' the law is likely to be a bad one."

Sellin thinks good statistics would be of great value to those who administer the law as well as to those who make it. Police, judges and penologists need statistics to check the effectiveness and the efficiency of their work. But how does one go about collecting good statistics?

Caught *vs.* uncaught criminals

ONE variety of criminal statistics, collected widely in Europe, deals only with proved offenses for which convictions have been obtained. This is based on the belief that one cannot tabulate a crime until the exact nature of an offense has been determined by a court and the guilt of the accused established. Statistics based on anything short of this are based legally on hearsay. But the system has its flaws. The criminologist is interested in *all* criminals, not merely in those who are caught. The convicted criminal may be a very poor representative of his class—the dumb-john, the bungling, lead-footed fellow who is so stupid that he cannot escape, or so reckless or arrogant that he does not try hard. Convicted criminals are, at the very best, only a small sample of all criminals, and possibly a bad one.

A second variety of criminal statistics deals with crimes known to the police, whether the criminals are apprehended or not. The "crimes known" system is used in the U.S. and some European countries and it too has its flaws. When crimes are reported to the police, the police must investigate them and determine whether crimes actually have

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been committed. This requires some legal knowledge which the police may not always possess, although ordinarily a competent police officer can make a fairly accurate judgment. A second flaw, since the criminologist is interested not only in all criminals but in all crimes, is that some crimes are almost invariably reported to the police, while others are almost never reported.

Sellin, in discussing this point, mentions a crime that it is safe to say is "always" reported. For a moment it might be interesting to guess what this crime is. Murder? But in the rural U.S., where country coroners are not required to have medical degrees, dozens and perhaps hundreds of murders are passed off as suicides or accidental deaths each year. Assault? But consider domestic assault, where not a sound or sign escapes to the outside world. Rape? Consider Dr. Kinsey. By and large, the one crime that is always reported is bank robbery.

Recently, when he was pressed to name more crimes that are always reported, or almost always, Sellin was able to think of only one other. "I suppose you might include," he said, "cases of gross violence against a police officer."

'White collar' crime

AMONG the crimes that are almost never reported are incest, fornication and, to a somewhat lesser extent, adultery. In recent years there may have been a pronounced increase in so-called "white collar" crime, which includes expense account fraud, income tax evasion, stock swindles and similar affairs in large number. Perhaps a large proportion of these is unreported. But if these flaws are compensated for intelligently, so that some excitable legislator does not conclude that bank robbery is rampant and demand the death penalty for it, or so that soft-minded citizens are not lulled into thinking no thieves wear white collars, the "crimes known" system of statistics has much in its favor. It appears to be the one which will eventually present the best over-all picture.

There are problems in getting such a system well established. The first has already been pointed out: the U.S. is a federated country with 49 jurisdictions, including the District of Columbia, 49 sets of laws and perhaps 49 different ways of enforcing them. England may develop good national statistics because it has a uniform penal code, but the U.S. may not. However, Sellin sees no cause for despair in that. If good statistics can be developed in the several states, that will be all that will be required. The real hitch lies in getting the several states to act.

For a number of years there have been organized efforts to get a uniform criminal statistics act passed in the states. The National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws recommended such an act in 1937, and the American Bar Association lent its weight to the movement, which got nowhere. In the early '40s Dr. Sellin was requested to redraft the act, in the hope that it could be made more attractive to state legislatures. Several states have shown interest in it but it has been passed only in California, which today has perhaps the best criminal statistics in the nation. (They reveal that California, at least, is not being engulfed in a crime wave. There were increases in the state's crime rate in 1953 and 1954, but these were more than wiped out by a substantial decrease in 1955. In 1956 there was a slight increase.)

There is nothing dramatic or startling about Sellin's uniform criminal statistics act. It does not propose anything that would in any way diminish the rights of any state. In sum, it merely proposes that the state establish a criminal statistics bureau, directed by a trained professional statistician with power to set up a good system. The problem is public inertia, together with the widespread assumption that the U.S. already has good criminal statistics, or even if it does not, may not need them.

But these things do not deeply disturb Sellin. As a social scientist he takes a very long view. "After all," he says, "the collection of criminal statistics did not even begin until yesterday, relatively—in the 1820s, in France. The U.S. will get around to it. Today the state spends millions on agricultural research to get bigger and better pigs and poultry; eventually it will spend a little money for research on how to get more law-abiding people." This could be a dismal comment, like the one Abraham Lincoln wrote as a boy in one of his copybooks: "Abraham Lincoln, his hand and pen. He will be good but God knows when." But Lincoln managed to turn out all right, and Sellin believes the U.S. will too.

If the Uniform Crime Reports of the FBI may be criticized by a statistician, the fact remains that the reports may still be quite correct in stating that the rate of crime is increasing fast. If the conclusion is correct, it makes little difference how it was arrived at. Moreover, since 1953 the FBI, in addition to measuring the volume of crime,

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UP-TO-DATE STATISTICS are compiled on business machines in Sacramento, Calif. The only state to have passed the Uniform Criminal Statistics Act, California now has the most accurate crime data in the nation.

now notes population growth each year as well. The current report says that the rate of crime is increasing much faster than the population, and this may be a real cause for concern. But again Sellin has a few observations to make.

"Urbanization affects crime—crime accompanies the change from a familistic cooperative society to an individualistic, competitive one," Sellin says. When the Puerto Rican comes to New York, or the Mexican to the American Southwest or the deep South Negro to Detroit, he becomes confused in the new culture, and crime is one of his reactions. Later, perhaps in a generation or two or three, he simmers down, adjusts and no longer behaves so badly. Therefore, before becoming alarmed about the increase in the crime rate in relation to the increase in population, one should know something about the rate of urbanization. If the cities are growing today at the expense of the countryside, the crime rate may be rising. But in the long view, after the country boys have adjusted, there may be no more criminality than there was before. This is a dreadfully cold comfort to the parents of a teen-ager who may have been beaten to death by a Harlem gang, but there is logic in it.

The 'criminal' age group

ANOTHER cause for the increased crime rates may be found in the current character of the population. Young people, particularly young males in the 15- to 35-year range, commit most of the crimes. Today the nation has many such people on hand, and it is to be expected that the crime rate will rise. Toward the close of World War II, Sellin was asked to prepare a pamphlet for use in Army demobilization centers in this country, on the subject of crime and the future. "I remember," he says, "that my thought at the time was to tell them certainly, if you have seven million young men in the 'criminal' age group committing their crimes overseas, or being restrained from committing them, certainly you will have what looks like a 'crime wave' when you turn them loose at home."

The sober statistical approach to crime becomes frustrating and irritating to those who feel they can trust their own observation. Almost any police chief in any large city will state flatly that a tremendous proportion of crime is committed by juveniles and by Negroes. (In some cities Puerto Ricans and Mexicans are included in the list.) Juvenile delinquency, as it happens, is a worldwide, not merely a national, problem. At a recent world congress sponsored by the United Nations, delegates from almost every nation spoke with deep concern about it. A particular kind of delinquency—wanton, seemingly brainless vandalism—seems to be affecting the youth of the world. However no delegate offered any statistics on the problem, and thus it remains unmeasured.

Good statistics on juvenile delinquency are singularly difficult to accumulate. Arrest figures must be used, rather than "crimes known to the police" system, because the delinquents must actually be caught and their age determined before it can be said that they are in fact juveniles. The use of arrest figures creates a number of problems. "First," Sellin says, "the police are likelier to arrest juveniles merely on suspicion, to hold them for questioning, than to arrest adults. Also the number of juvenile arrests in any given year includes

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The story behind the news—told by Ernest R. Breech, Chairman of the Board, and Henry Ford II, President, Ford Motor Company

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Ernest R. Breech, Chairman Henry Ford II, President

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TURN PAGE

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CLEARING SIDEWALK of youths gathered in New York neighborhood where teen-age gang murder had taken place, cop orders boys to move on.

WORLD OF CRIME CONTINUED

repeated arrests of the same individual—a known member of a juvenile gang may be picked up a dozen times, adding 12 arrests to the total. And juveniles tend to commit offenses in groups, which result in mass arrests, even though finally it turns out that only one or two members of the gang are charged with the crime."

Another of Sellin's observations about the statistics of juvenile delinquency is that they are considerably affected by the attitude of the public. Currently the nation is deeply disturbed over the misbehavior of the young, and individual citizens are fairly quick to lodge complaints. A gang of youths congregating on a street corner for no more sinister purpose than a game of stickball may look, to a jittery observer, as though they are about to fight a battle. A complaint is lodged, the police round up the youths, and they all become statistics.

For whatever they may be worth, the statistics of New York and other major cities show that in the first eight months of 1957 the upward trend of juvenile delinquency in recent years has been modified. It is still upward but the angle is less steep. No one knows what this means, if it means anything at all. A reasonable guess is that the agencies which combat juvenile delinquency are beginning to form a better notion of their problem and to attack it with at least a little success.

Substitutes for crime

JUVENILE delinquency is largely a problem of the depressed areas, the slums, of big cities. Underprivileged, misunderstood and frequently unwanted adolescents, unable to find recognition and dignity in their own homes, look for it elsewhere. They form gangs—the Phantom Lords, the Egyptian Kings, the Imperial Hoods—and the gangs commit crimes, not because the individual adolescents are innately criminal but because crime seems to them to be a good means of winning recognition. Strong retaliation by society in the form of skull-cracking, jailing and attempts to disperse the gangs has not achieved notable success. The current approach, now being followed by the organizations such as the New York City Youth Board, the Youth Commission of Chicago and the Youth Service Board of Philadelphia, is to provide substitutes for crime in which adolescents may win legitimate recognition. The substitutes may range from athletics to music to job-training, and not all of them are successful. It is fatuous to suppose that the Egyptian Kings will scrap their switchblades the moment a ruddy-cheeked social worker suggests a nice game of softball. But some progress is being made, and it may be because of this that juvenile delinquency has passed its peak—if it has.

In the case of Negro crime the picture is both clearer and gloomier than in the case of juvenile delinquency. No matter what statistics are used—the number of arrests, the number sentenced to federal prisons—it is plain that Negroes are not only charged with a disproportionate amount of crime but actually commit it. Although Negroes constitute only 10% of the U.S. population, 30% of all arrests made in the nation last year involved Negroes. The Negro rate of arrest for criminal homicide is 10 times that of the white race; the Negro rate of arrest for robbery is 10 times greater, and for assault, almost 17 times greater. Why?

In Sellin's view, and in that of the great majority of sociologists, the fault lies not with the Negro himself but elsewhere. "The responsibility lies where power, authority and discrimination has its source, the dominant white group. To that group the existence of a high

CONTINUED

back to school . . . but they didn't outgrow their

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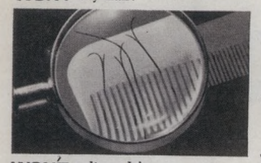

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BESTFORM
GIRDLES AND BRAS

"BANDIT'S ROOST" in New York's Mulberry Street in 1890s housed Italians who, like most economically exploited immigrant groups, had a high incidence of crime. As Sellin explains, this dropped as they prospered.

crime rate and delinquency among Negroes is a challenge which cannot be brushed aside by unscientific platitudes about 'race inferiority,' 'inherited depravity' or similar generalizations."

Negroes are a "have not" group, the victims of prejudice. Until they are allowed real equality, and even for a time thereafter until they adjust to it, their rate of criminality will be high. As Sellin points out, in the past other "have not" groups, such as the 19th Century Irish and Italian immigrants in New York City, have had very high crime rates and have lowered them as they prospered. In the meantime, until the dominant white group sees fit to give the Negro equality, the dominant white group may have to chew upon the following observation, which Sellin credits to the Italian criminologist Enrico Ferri. "Society," said Ferri, "has the criminality it deserves." Mexicans, like Negroes, have high crime rates, and for the same reason.

The seasons of crime

THERE remain some interesting footnotes about the patterns of crime in the U.S., in regard to geography and seasons, which have turned up in the statistics of the FBI and other organizations. The 18th Century French writer Montesquieu believed that criminality increases in proportion as the equator is approached and that drunkenness increases as the poles are approached. He may have been right. The FBI's statistics appear to show that the states of the southeast and the Gulf area have the highest per capita rates for murder and assault, with the rates generally decreasing toward the north and reaching a low point in New England and the prairie west. Robbery is more common in the west than the east. As for seasonal variations, it appears that crimes against the person, such as rape and assault, are considerably more common in summer than in winter. Negligent manslaughter, which usually involves an automobile, reaches a sharp peak in midwinter when darkness comes early and road conditions are poor. Robberies and burglaries decline in summer and are most common at the Christmas season. In these variations there is more than casual interest for the alert police chief; good statistics can tell him when and where to look for the shoplifter or the rapist, and thus help him to prevent crime.

To readers who have come this far into the discussion of crime in the U.S. it may be disappointing to be left with so little to hang onto. But while the power of positive thinking is not to be laughed at, the power of negative thinking has something in its favor too. From it

CONTINUED

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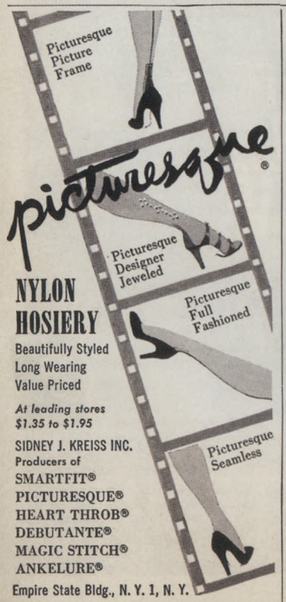

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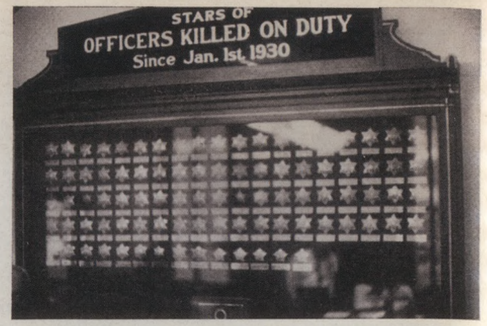

HEROES' BADGES worn by police who died on duty make grim display in Chicago police headquarters. In U.S. last year 55 in police work were killed.

WORLD OF CRIME CONTINUED

emerge certain truths, small and homely but truths nonetheless, and they are these:

▸ No one can be sure whether the U.S. is having a crime wave or not. A good judgment can only be formed on the basis of statistics, not newspaper headlines, and the statistics are too poor.

▸ Crime is a condition of society. As conditions seemed deplorable to the writers of the Old Testament, so they seem deplorable to men today.

▸ There is some hope. The problem of crime cannot be eliminated but it can be partially solved. Good statistics, a reasonable picture of what actually occurs, is the first step in that direction. When the nation finally knows who commits crime, how, at what place, in what season, at what hour, why, more can be done about crime than is now being done. California has already taken its forward step, and the statistics of a few other states, notably Minnesota, have in recent years been much improved.

Perspective on crime

IN the meantime there are current aspects of the problem of crime that are deeply provocative and worrisome. Whether or not the U.S. is having a "wave" of crime, there is surely plenty of it—much too much for the average citizen's liking. Every year people by thousands are killed and robbed and swindled and cops are killed in line of duty. What is needed most is to see the problem of crime in its proper perspective, a perspective which this six-part series is designed to supply.

Does the average citizen get a square deal from his local police force, and what city offers just about the squarest? Does every accused man get a fair shake in the courts, and where is he apt to get the fairest? Are the nation's criminal laws up to date, and do they provide equal justice for all? Are the prisons helping the criminal—and protecting society at the same time? And what kind of man is the criminal anyway? Are there strange forces within him that drive him to violence and make his crimes excusable? Finally, what of the white collar criminal, the swindler, the cheat, the embezzler? The problem of crime is great, and greatly ramified; to it, this first instalment has been only an introduction.

NEXT WEEK: A GOOD POLICE FORCE AND WHAT MAKES IT GOOD

The first line of defense in society's stand against crime is the police force, and in Cincinnati the force is good enough to serve as a model which citizens of other cities can use in demanding efficient forces of their own. Part II of LIFE's Crime Series will show how Cincinnati got that way . . . how its chief of police makes good public relations pay dividends in crook-catching . . . how its policemen start young and stay clean . . . how the ingenious quadrant system catches fleeing criminals.

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List of Plates

Gordon Parks (1912–2006)
Raiding Detectives, Chicago, Illinois, 1957
Gelatin silver print
12 3/8 x 17 7/16 in. (31.5 x 44.3 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gift of the photographer in honor of Edward Steichen

All works are by Gordon Parks (1912–2006) and have been acquired by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, through the The Family of Man Fund. Plates are indicated by page numbers.

19. *Untitled*, New York, New York, 1957
Pigmented inkjet print, printed 2019
20 x 24 in. (50.8 x 60.96 cm) (sheet)

20. (top) *Untitled*, Chicago, Illinois, 1957
Pigmented inkjet print, printed 2019
16 x 20 in. (40.64 x 50.8 cm) (sheet)

20. (bottom) *Untitled*, Chicago, Illinois, 1957
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33. (bottom) *Untitled*, New York, New York, 1957
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36. *Drug Search*, Chicago, Illinois, 1957
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44. (top) *Untitled*, Chicago, Illinois, 1957
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51. *Detectives Grilling a Suspect*, Chicago, Illinois, 1957
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53. *Fingerprinting Addicts for Forging Prescriptions*, Chicago, Illinois, 1957
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57. *Untitled*, Chicago, Illinois, 1957
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60. *Untitled*, Chicago, Illinois, 1957
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61. *Untitled*, Chicago, Illinois, 1957
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63. *Shooting Victim in Cook County Morgue*, Chicago, Illinois, 1957
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65. *Untitled*, 1957
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66. *Untitled*, San Quentin, California, 1957
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67. *Untitled*, San Quentin, California, 1957
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69. (bottom) *Untitled*, San Quentin, California, 1957
Pigmented inkjet print, printed 2019
16 x 20 in. (40.64 x 50.8 cm) (sheet)

70. *Untitled*, San Quentin, California, 1957
Pigmented inkjet print, printed 2019
16 x 20 in. (40.64 x 50.8 cm) (sheet)

71. *Untitled*, San Quentin, California, 1957
Pigmented inkjet print, printed 2019
20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.64 cm) (sheet)

73. *Untitled* (Alcatraz Island), San Francisco, California, 1957
Pigmented inkjet print, printed 2019
16 x 20 in. (40.64 x 50.8 cm) (sheet)

Contributors

Fingerprinting of an addict at Chicago Police Headquarters.
Narcotics Division
LIFE
LIFE
brass knuckles & gun found on marijuana addicts arrested in
raid by detectives of Chicago Police Dept. Narcotics Division
LIFE
detectives of the Chicago Police Dept's narcotics squad search-
ing room of a known addict
San Quentin Prison, California

Gordon Parks (1912–2006)
Original slides from "Crime," *Life* story no. 51465, 1957
The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York

A selection of photographs from this publication will be featured in the installation *Gordon Parks and "The Atmosphere of Crime,"* on view at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, from May 2020 through September 2021.

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